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ABSTRACT

Developed in response to requests from a variety of family support professionals, teachers, and parents, this sourcebook offers information on preventing violence in children at different stages of development. The introduction provides a rationale for the development of this sourcebook, discusses parental influence, and describes how parents can use this guide. The sourcebook is organized to offer access to information on the three primary developmental stages in childhood: the early years (birth to 5 years), middle childhood (6 to 12 years), and adolescence (13 to 18 years). Within each section are subsections that give an overview of development during that stage and that identify some of the issues affecting violence in children and over which parents have significant control. In addition, each subsection is summarized as a one-page handout for parents; these summary sheets are designed for photocopying as workshop handouts. Topics discussed in the early years section include brain development and infant attachment, impulse control, prosocial skills, violence on television and other media, toys that promote violent behavior, early childcare experiences, and managing family conflict. Areas highlighted in middle childhood include peer relationships, popular entertainment media, after-school care and monitoring, school success, conflict management, and caring connections. Topics discussed in the adolescent section include activities and volunteerism, substance abuse, access to weapons, peer influences, dating relationships, and transitions from adolescence to young

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adulthood. Each section contains references. The guide also includes links to a large on-line appendix with longer articles supplementing the various subsections that can be accessed through the National Parent Information Network web site. (KB)

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by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson

Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents

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Table of Contents

Foreword ix

Introduction 1

Why a *Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents*? 1
What parenting issues have been selected for discussion in this *Guide*? 2
How does domestic violence affect children? 2
How does "parenting style" help to shield children from violence? 3
How does a healthy family help to shield children from violence? 3
How can parents use this *Guide*? 4
How important is parental influence? 5
References 6

The Early Years (Birth – 5 years) 7

Developmental Overview 7
Brain Development and Infant Attachment 9
Impulse Control 13
Prosocial Skills 16
Violence on Television and in Other Media 19
Toys That Promote Violent Behavior 22
Early Child Care Experiences 25
Managing Family Conflict 28
References 31

The Middle Years (6 – 12 years)....................................33

Developmental Overview....................................33

Peer Relationships....................................35

Popular Entertainment Media....................................40

Appropriate After-School Care and Monitoring....................................43

Encouraging School Success....................................47

Conflict Management Skills....................................51

Caring Connections....................................54

References....................................57

The Teen Years (13 – 18 years)....................................59

Developmental Overview....................................59

Organized Activities, Volunteerism, and Community Involvement....................................61

Substance Abuse....................................64

Access to Guns and Other Weapons....................................68

Peer Influences....................................72

Dating Relationships....................................75

Successful Transitions from Adolescence to Young Adulthood....................................79

References....................................83

6

About IVPA, NPIN, and the ERIC System & ERIC/EECE.......87

The Illinois Violence Prevention Authority (IVPA) 87

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) 89

The ERIC System and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education 91

Contents of Online Appendix to This *Guide*

The Online Appendix is located on the Web at **http://npin.org/ivpaguide/appendix**. If you do not have Web access, please contact the National Parent Information Network at 800-583-4135 to request a printout of articles of interest.

Amy Aidman. *Television Violence: Content, Context, and Consequences*

Amy Aidman. *Understanding Violent Acts in Children: An Interview with Dr. Edward Taylor*

Ron Banks. *Bullying in Schools*

Bullying Resource List

Betty A. Beach. *Perspectives on Rural Child Care*

Bonnie Benard, Resiliency Associates. *Turning It All Around: From Risk to Resilience*

William A. Borgen and Norman E. Amundson. *Models of Adolescent Transition*

Jere Brophy. *Failure Syndrome Students*

The Brown Adolescent Newsletter: Drug Abuse Prevention: Programs That Work

Gary Burnett. *Gangs in Schools*

Bernard Cesarone. *Video Games: Research, Ratings, Recommendations*

Ann-Marie Clark. *Helping Young Children Make New Friends at Sc'*

Lillian Coltin. *Enriching Children's Out-of-School Time*

Does Moving Have a Harmful Impact on Children?

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. *Factors That Inhibit Risky Student Behavior*

Mary Finley. *Cultivating Resilience: An Overview for Rural Educators and Parents*

Judy S. Freedman. *Easing the Teasing*

Courtney Garland. *SEARCH Institute's Asset Approach: Protecting Youth through Community Collaboration*

Joan Gaustad. *The Fundamentals of School Security*

Guidelines for Family Television Viewing

Willard W. Hartup. *Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts*

Helping Your Child Learn Responsible Behavior

Carollee Howes. *Infant Child Care*

Jan Jewett. *Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies*

Lilian G Katz, Amy Aidman, Debbie A. Reese, and Ann-Marie Clark. *Preventing and Resolving Parent-Teacher Differences*

Kristen M. Kemple. *Understanding and Facilitating Preschool Children's Peer Acceptance*

Kids & Media @ The New Millennium: Some Findings

Bettina A. Lankard. *Parents and the School-to-Work Transition of Special Needs Youth*

Anne Lewis. *Urban Youth in Community Service: Becoming Part of the Solution*

Marian Marion. *Helping Young Children Deal with Anger*

Marilyn S. Massey. *Early Childhood Violence Prevention*

Diane E. McClellan and Lilian G Katz. *Assessing Young Children's Social Competence*

National Association for the Education of Young Children. *Brain Development Research—What It Means for Young Children and Families*

National Association for the Education of Young Children. *When Babies and Toddlers Are in Child Care, Accreditation Is a Key to Quality*

Peggy Patten. *Are Our Boys All Right?*

Peggy Patten. *Dating Violence: Why Does It Occur and How Does It Fit in the Cycle of Violence?*

Peggy Patten. *Divorce and Children Part I: An Interview with Robert Hughes, Jr., Ph.D.*

Peggy Patten. *Expanded After-School Options Still Leave Parents with Tough Choices*

Peggy Patten. *Extracurricular Activities in Children's Lives*

Peggy Patten. *The Fourth 'R': Teacher-Child Relationships Are Central to Quality*

Peggy Patten. *Girls, Aggressive?*

Peggy Patten. *How Parents and Peers Influence Children's School Success*

Peggy Patten. *Kids Who Care: The Development of Empathy, Care, and Compassion*

Peggy Patten. *Marital Relationships, Children, and Their Friends: What's the Connection? An Interview with E. Mark Cummings*

Peggy Patten. *The Parent-Child Relationship as Violence Prevention*

Peggy Patten. *Playing with Guns, War Play, and Superheroes: What's the Big Deal?*

Peggy Patten. *Saying No to Guns: It's Not Enough. An Interview with Marjorie Hardy*

Peggy Patten. *Substance Abuse and Learning Disabilities: Is There a Link?*

Peggy Patten. *Volunteerism and Youth: What Do We Know?*

Peggy Patten and Omar Benton Ricks. *Child Care Quality: An Overview for Parents*

Dawn Ramsburg. *Brain Development in Young Children: The Early Years ARE Learning Years*

Dawn Ramsburg. *The Debate over Spanking*

Debbie Reese. *Latchkey Children*

Omar Benton Ricks. *New Report Urges Community-Based Rehabilitation for Youth, Not "Adult Time"*

Anne S. Robertson. *Building a Healthy Community*

Anne S. Robertson. *Drug Use Rises for Teenagers*

Anne S. Robertson. *If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School, What Can Parents and Teachers Do?*

Anne S. Robertson. *Preventing Substance Abuse at Home and at School*

Anne S. Robertson. *When Retention Is Recommended, What Should Parents Do?*

Anne S. Robertson. *When Should Parents Contact the Teacher? How Effective Parent-School Partnerships Can Prevent School Difficulties*

Anne S. Robertson. *"Zero Tolerance": What Parents Should Know*

Wendy Schwartz. *After-School Programs for Urban Youth*

Wendy Schwartz. *A Community Guide to Youth Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Programs*

Wendy Schwartz. *How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts*

Wendy Schwartz. *How to Prepare Your Children for Work*

Wendy Schwartz. *An Overview of Strategies to Reduce School Violence*

Wendy Schwartz. *Preparing Middle School Students for a Career*

Wendy Schwartz. *Urban School-Community Parent Programs to Prevent Drug Use*

Lawrence J. Schweinhart. *Lasting Benefits of Preschool Programs*

Marilyn E. Smith. *Television Violence and Behavior: A Research Summary*

Matthew Soska. *How Can Schools Help Prevent Children from Using Drugs?*

Beverly B. Swanson. *What Is a Quality Preschool Program?*

Urban After-School Programs: Evaluations and Recommendations

Lorraine B. Wallach. *Violence and Young Children's Development*

Foreword

Many parents and families today live far from extended family members or trusted friends. Parents tell us that they do not always know where to turn for information or high-quality resources when their child is having difficulty. To respond to the growing information needs of parents and families, the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) offers easy access to high-quality information for parents, educators, and family support professionals and is now one of the largest noncommercial collections of parenting information on the Internet.

We often hear from parents that they are concerned about teasing, aggressive play, bullying, and other behaviors that might be a sign that a child or teenager is capable of violence. Parents, teachers, parenting educators, and family support professionals are often unable to find high-quality resources that provide a balanced view, in a parent-friendly format, on the difficult and complex issues surrounding the problem of violence in children. In response to requests from a variety of family support professionals, teachers, and parents, NPIN has developed this *Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* as a sourcebook on preventing violence in children.

How to Use This Book

This publication has been organized to offer easy access to information on the three primary developmental stages in childhood: *The Early Years*, *The Middle Years*, and *The Teen Years*. Within each section are subsections that identify some of the issues that have an impact on violence in children, and over which parents have a significant amount of control. In addition, each subsection has been summarized as a one-page handout for busy parents. These *Parent Summary Sheets* are included in the back pocket of this publication. They can be easily photocopied so that busy parents and busy professionals can quickly grasp the important issues related to a specific violence prevention topic at each developmental stage.

The *Guide* is written primarily for leaders of parenting groups, for parenting professionals, and for parents who want more than an overview of issues. The *Summary Sheets* are useful as handouts for workshops involving groups of parents and those who work with parents.

The *Guide* also includes links to a large appendix with longer articles related to the various subsections that can be accessed through the NPIN Web site (http://npin.org/ivpaguide/appendix/). Portable document format (PDF) versions of these articles are available at this Web address. HTML versions are noted at the end of each subsection. The appendix includes many articles that were chosen to supplement the information in the *Guide*. The resources that were chosen for the PDF appendix were not only selected for their content and relevance to the violence prevention issue being discussed, but also because the documents are in the public domain and can be easily duplicated for sharing with parents or others interested in the topic—perhaps as part of an informal discussion group.

As with our other NPIN resources, we encourage you to share the information that you find helpful with parents, parenting groups, teachers, or community groups. Working together, we can create safe families and communities for all of our children.

Introduction

Why a *Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents?*

Media attention and public concern about serious violence and antisocial behavior among children and youth in the United States have grown in recent years, especially after the recent tragic and violent events in several public schools. Not surprisingly, some recent surveys suggest that the American public rates crime and violence among the most important problems facing our country [3]. Other research shows encouraging trends, including a decrease over the past 5 years in school crime and the reporting by 99% of public schools that no incidents of serious violent crime have taken place in their buildings ([12], p. 1).

If we define violence as *the exertion of emotional or physical force with the intention of causing harm to another*, then violence prevention is the effort to intervene *before* harm is caused. Throughout history, children have been threatened with various types of harm—among them life-threatening diseases, natural disasters, and war. Although these threats may not have been avoidable, they were usually understandable. Parents can understand that there may be no way to keep a child from being stricken with a deadly disease or injured during the devastation of a flood or hurricane. The causes and effects of violence, on the other hand, are more difficult to understand and to predict. Parents seldom know where, how, and when violence is likely to take place, and if anything can be done to prevent it.

A recent survey supported by Public Agenda as part of their National Issues Forums suggests three possible strategies to help prevent violence in our culture. First, we can foster a nonviolent popular culture that does not portray violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts. Second, we should provide more help for those children who are considered at risk to commit violence than they currently receive from educators, health care providers, and law enforcement professionals. Third, we must offer children moral discipline at home and in our communities [10].

The causes and effects of violence are difficult to understand and to predict.

Just as researchers are working in health care to understand and prevent the spread of HIV and new strains of tuberculosis, researchers are also working to understand and prevent violence. Although much of our understanding about the development of aggression is based on clinical studies of children or youth who have alarming or extreme behaviors, much has also been learned generally about the factors that contribute to violence. Many groups are using this knowledge to incorporate violence prevention efforts into child care programs, schools, churches, and youth organizations. This *Guide* was prepared to help parents understand some of the factors that may contribute to violence and what they can do at home and in the community to help prevent violence.

> *Risk factors affect a child's tendency to act or react aggressively.... Protective factors are likely to help buffer or reduce the impact of a risk factor.*

What parenting issues have been selected for discussion in this *Guide*?

There is no single factor responsible for violent behavior in children, and there is no easy way to insure that every child will avoid becoming a victim—or a perpetrator—of violence. Instead, a variety of factors, commonly called "risk factors," interact and may affect a child's tendency to act or react aggressively. The more of these factors that are present in a child's life, the greater his or her risk of being a victim or perpetrator of violent behavior. The issues that we have chosen to explore in this *Guide* are ones that have been linked in some way with violent or aggressive behavior, and are risk factors upon which parents have some direct influence. The *Guide* also discusses "protective factors," or those characteristics that are likely to help buffer or reduce the impact of a risk factor.

Limited space prevents this *Guide* from containing a complete discussion of violence-related factors. Some issues that may influence aggression in children are mentioned only briefly or excluded from the *Guide* because much has been written about them elsewhere. Others have been excluded because they are so complex that they warrant separate treatment. The most significant of these is the influence of family violence across the child's life span. Research on the severe effects of domestic violence and child abuse is mentioned later in the Introduction. Additional references to the impact of family violence on later aggression are found in two sections in the Early Years chapter: Brain Development and Infant Attachment, and Managing Family Conflict.

The *Guide* also focuses primarily on typically developing children. Issues such as temperament and attention deficits are discussed only briefly, even though they are believed to contribute to patterns of impulsiveness and possibly aggression in children. It is important for parents to know that if a child simply has an attention deficit disorder or learning disability it does not necessarily mean that the child will also be aggressive or violent. Although the pathways of these influences are less clearly understood [3], research suggests that a child's risk for delinquent behavior increases dramatically when a child has a combination of risk factors such as irritability or impulsivity, hyperactivity, learning disabilities, or an attention deficit disorder [2]. Early and accurate identification of and intervention on behalf of children with special needs are protective factors and can make a substantial difference in the long-term outcomes for children. Without early diagnosis and appropriate intervention and support, learning disabilities, for example, can lead to a variety of negative outcomes for children, including loss of self-esteem, dropping out of school, and, in some severe cases, even juvenile delinquency [16; 17].

How does domestic violence affect children?

One of the most common pathways to aggressive behavior in children occurs in children who are victims of physical and emotional abuse [9; 11]. The cycle of family violence is complicated since other problems, including poverty and substance abuse, affect the likelihood of family violence. Children who witness their parents' violence are at a significant risk of being abused themselves—by their parents or by other adults in the household ([21], pp. 6–8). In fact, in 30% to 60% of families experiencing family violence, both partner violence and child abuse are present in the family ([6], p. 3).

Exposure to domestic violence can have a severe impact on children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. These effects include more anger and other behavior problems in school along with lower grades and test scores. Children who are exposed to domestic violence also are more likely to be depressed and have suicidal thoughts ([7], p. 27). Studies of children who have been physically abused show that not only are they more aggressive but they also are less likely to help another child in trouble than are children who have not been abused ([3], p. 820). In his work with boys in jail for violent crimes, James Garbarino found that being abused as a child was a significant risk factor for juvenile violence. In the men he studied, Garbarino found that a history of child abuse increased *by 7 times* the likelihood that the man would be diagnosed with a conduct disorder. Since children diagnosed with conduct disorders are more likely to be impulsive and to have difficulty communicating, following rules, and making transitions, they have an increased likelihood of becoming delinquent ([6], pp. 1, 5). However, early intervention, parenting education, school success, and family support can help reduce the chances of long-term serious consequences.

How does "parenting style" help to shield children from violence?

There are many variables that play a major role in influencing a child's behavior. Parenting style, for example, can *contribute* to aggressive behavior in children or it can *moderate* some of the negative influences that are part of growing up in our society. Some researchers find it helpful to think of parenting styles as falling within one of three general categories: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. An authoritative parenting style (as opposed to a predominantly permissive or authoritarian parenting style) has been shown to help children become mature, socially competent, and disciplined members of society. Authoritative parenting is characterized by high levels of nurturing and responsiveness, support, and nonpunitive discipline. It is also demanding, but at the same time low in the kinds of psychological control that rely on guilt, withdrawal of love, or shaming [5; 13].

In several studies by psychologist Laurence Steinberg and others, authoritative parenting was associated with many positive outcomes for adolescents. Parents who used an authoritative style of parenting—and treated their adolescents warmly, firmly, and democratically—had adolescents who did better in school, had positive attitudes towards their school achievement, were more self-reliant, reported less anxiety and depression, and were less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors [15; 18; 19].

> *Parenting style can contribute to aggressive behavior in children or it can moderate some of the negative influences that are part of growing up in our society today.*

A recent summary of research on parenting further supports the benefits of an authoritative parenting style. The summary states, "adolescents from authoritative homes are more susceptible to pro-social peer pressure (e.g., pressure to do well in school), but less susceptible to anti-social peer pressure (e.g., pressure to use illicit drugs and alcohol). In other words, the particular peers a youngster selects as friends and the extent to which he or she is susceptible to their influence are both affected by parenting" [4].

How can you learn more about parenting characteristics? We have cited some additional resources for more information on parenting style in the Resources on the Web sections.

How does a healthy family help to shield children from violence?

Research completed by family development leaders such as Nick Stinnet, Dolores Curran, and Robert Hill suggests that "healthy families" or "strong families" have some common characteristics and can prepare children to handle most of life's threats and hazards. For example, Nick Stinnet's research highlighted six traits in strong families, including appreciation for each other, spending time together, good communication patterns, a commitment to the family, a high degree of religious orientation, and the ability to deal with crises in a positive manner [14]. Curran's research identified 15 traits in healthy families, including the ability to communicate and listen, to affirm and support one another, to teach respect for others, to develop a sense of trust, and to admit and seek help with problems [20]. During the turbulent period of the 1960s and 1970s, researcher Robert Hill focused on the strengths of African American families and found five additional characteristics that appeared to stabilize the African American family. Those traits included strong kinship bonds, a strong work orientation, adaptability of family roles, a strong achievement orientation, and a strong religious orientation [14].

> *'Healthy families' or 'strong families' have some common characteristics and can prepare children to handle most of life's threats and hazards.*

The influence that healthy family factors have on a child's behavior may be particularly important for children with attention deficits. In their book *The Youngest Minds*, authors Ann and Richard Barnet report that children with risk factors such as attention deficits sometimes also have behavior problems. Whether these behavior problems may lead to more serious conduct disorders—including a group of more serious behaviors that persist, such as lying, stealing, truancy, and fighting [2]—depends largely on the availability of strong families as a protective factor.

On the other hand, families considered at risk or lacking in a significant number of family strengths may engage in behaviors that can make their children more vulnerable to even mild dangers in the outside world [8]. In his book *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment*, James Garbarino echoes the lists of identified characteristics of strong families that earlier researchers defined. It appears that especially when struggling with issues like marital conflict, separation, and divorce, children benefit from a strong family. "Family strength transcends family structure; it derives from a process, not a formal arrangement," says Garbarino ([8], p. 56). In other words, family strengths and healthy resilience can be observed in any family structure—traditional, single parent, foster parent, stepparent, and other family types.

How can parents use this *Guide*?

The topical areas included in this *Guide* include discussions of parenting strategies that can be used by parents with all children under their care and guidance, including their own children and children of relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition, parents will find information in the *Guide* on becoming strong advocates for change and for incorporating violence prevention efforts in their children's school, the local community, and the larger society. The *Guide* also suggests some ways that parents may choose to advocate for a more peaceful community. This *Guide* also provides the information needed to acquire some of the relevant resources.

Although the topical areas are organized by developmental stage in the *Guide*, readers will recognize that there is overlap between stages. For example, behaviors related to impulse control and prosocial skills during a child's early years will certainly influence the child's ability to cope with bullying behaviors and manage conflict later in life. Issues included in the "The Early Years" section will continue to be issues of concern for later stages of development. These issues are discussed at the preschool level, however, because they are essential building blocks for violence prevention that can be acquired early in a child's life. Issues related to impulse control, prosocial skills, empathy, and managing family conflict, all of which can be addressed during a child's preschool years, remain a focus of parenting during a child's later school-age and adolescent years as well. Clearly, if the foundation for violence prevention is solid and well supported in the early years, it will be better able to hold up over time.

Finally, there is also frequent overlap among the issues. For example, when teens use alcohol and have access to guns, the risk for violent behavior increases [1].

How important is parental influence?

To be sure, parents have less control over their children's experiences as the children grow older and become more independent. This *Guide* lists resources and contact information for organizations that work with parents to help identify problem behaviors and to find interventions to alleviate problems once they are identified. But, if parenting children can be compared to sailing a ship, the foundation laid by parents and guardians in a child's early years, combined with regular communication, care, and attention from these significant adults in later years, are the anchors for children growing up in turbulent times. The information in this *Guide* is intended to help parents feel prepared for the journey as it relates to violence, to understand what storms might arise, and to take note of the icebergs that may appear in the waters of childhood and adolescence. We hope that identifying potential dangers will not result in becoming so preoccupied with the hazards of the journey that parents overlook the joys of parenting. As this *Guide* shows, parents are not alone on their journey.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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The Early Years
(Birth–5 years)

Developmental Overview

During the earliest years, parents are the center of a young child's universe. Most young children love and admire their parents and caregivers. They also have a strong desire to please their parents. When a child trusts and has a desire to please others, the child is more confident and able to try new skills. For example, during the early years children learn to crawl and walk, learn to eat and toilet, and acquire language. A young child develops self-esteem during the preschool years by facing challenges, experiencing some frustrations, and enjoying many successes.

Disappointment and failure are a necessary part of learning new skills. A young child watches how conflict and unhappiness are handled by those around him. Then the child practices handling anger, conflict, and frustration based on what he has seen. These early lessons contribute to the development of essential coping strategies that the child will use throughout childhood and adolescence.

Young children experiment with independence. A child may flip-flop between relying on her parents and asserting her will. Parents who set firm limits but also encourage, support, and respect their children help them gain confidence and self-control.

Very young children tend to play side by side. However, as children grow and become more independent, they learn to play and interact with other children. Children learn friendship skills, such as learning how to share and take turns. They also learn to use words and talk when they are angry or frustrated rather than yell or hit. Young children also learn how their actions affect others [39].

In this section, we suggest seven areas in which parents have a strong influence over their young child's experiences. Parents and caregivers can impact these areas in ways that *encourage and support* their child's healthy social development. Parents can also help *minimize* aggressive behavior in children. The seven areas in which parents have a major influence are brain development and infant attachment, impulse control, prosocial skills, violence on television and in other media, toys that promote violent behavior, early child care experiences, and managing family conflict. These areas represent a complex interaction of a variety of things that can contribute to a child's healthy development, or increase a child's risk for violence [18].

Seven areas in which parents exert great influence during a child's earliest years:

brain development & infant attachment
impulse control
prosocial skills
violence on television and other media
toys that promote violent behavior
early child care experiences
managing family conflict

As mentioned in the introduction to this *Guide*, parenting style and family strengths, along with temperament and other factors, are important. They can also contribute to patterns of healthy development or aggression in children. However, the seven areas discussed here seem to play a significant role in whether children become aggressive. Parents also have a significant amount of control over these areas and the skills that their child masters in each area. Brief research summaries are included about each area to help parents understand the role each plays in violence prevention. Also included is a list of resources that suggests where to get additional information and assistance.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Brain Development and Infant Attachment

How do brain development and infant attachment fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

The quality of a baby's early care—both before and after birth—has a lasting impact on the child's brain development. This is partly because the brains of humans are still a "work in progress" [4]. At birth a newborn baby has an estimated 100 billion nerve cells called *neurons*. Each neuron forms many *synapses*, or connections made between the brain cells [5; 32]. Synapses that are used repeatedly become permanent, while those less frequently used may be lost. The number of brain synapses increases to the adult level by the time a child is 2 years old. However, synapses continue to grow through adolescence and into adulthood [5].

> *The brain is a 'dynamic organism' that consistently reflects and adjusts to the individual's environment.*

Scientists suspect that early in life there are windows of time when certain parts of the brain are particularly responsive to stimulation and growth ([42], p. 9). If the child's needs are not met during these periods, the child may lose abilities or have impaired abilities. Poor eating habits, the mother's substance abuse, or a lack of appropriate stimulation may harm the growing brain [23]. Genes are important, but the brain is a "dynamic organism" that reflects and adjusts to the child's environment ([23], p. 24).

What we now know about brain growth in young children can help us understand and prevent violence. Dr. Bruce Perry talks about "use-dependent development," in which "the parts of the brain that grow and the parts that don't depend on the infant's experience" ([23], p. 25). Healthy brain development in very young children will enhance their ability to learn and develop friendships as they grow.

It is important to remember that research suggests that there isn't one thing or experience, biological or environmental, that *causes* a child to become violent. Instead, it is the combination of many things that may "set the stage" for a child to choose violence or to see violence as the only course of action open to him. The occasional mistakes in parenting and caregiving, which we all make, do not doom a child to a lifetime of violent behavior.

This section of the *Guide* discusses some of the risk factors that may contribute to the "roots of violence" ([23], pp. 228–229). This section also discusses how parents can help protect their child from violence during the early stages of life.

For example, one of the most important foundations of a child's healthy development is a secure relationship with his parents or with another caregiver [4]. This relationship is called "infant attachment" and is used to describe the ability of a baby to seek comfort from the parent or caregiver. This is the person that the baby will turn to when she is hungry, afraid, tired, ill, or simply wants attention. Healthy attachments for most babies will occur with their parents, brothers or sisters, and a familiar caregiver. Healthy attachments encourage both the baby's brain development and the baby's ability to grow and form good friendships later in life.

The baby's behavior and ability to control his or her feelings develop largely as a result of the quality of attachment the baby has with others [7]. Children who have parents who usually respond to their needs and are sensitive to their emotions generally do well socially in later life. When parents hold their child, talk to the baby, sing to him, and try to see the unique ways he communicates, they help the baby grow into a loving, caring child. Children who have parents who are inconsistent, unpredictable, or insensitive to their child's needs may have more difficulty forming friendships or deeper relationships as they get older [43]. Unpredictable parenting sometimes leads to "disorganized attachments" and may occur in children whose parents have mental health problems like depression, alcoholism or other substance abuse, or other stressful family problems [4; 40]. Children who have poor or disorganized attachments may also have problems such as extreme acting-out, in which the child lashes out to hurt others or consistently breaks rules. A child who is unable to form strong relationships may also withdraw and become very quiet or become afraid to play with other children [43].

Healthy, emotionally strong, and secure relationships during childhood create a framework that children use in their relationships with others throughout life. Babies with insecure, disorganized, and weak emotional bonds to their parents or caregivers are at risk for having more trouble feeling empathy for others and building relationships as they grow [32]. At any age, children can have accidents that cause severe brain trauma. In very young children, brain injuries may temporarily or permanently affect social judgment, empathy, and abstract reasoning.

Parents can help develop strong and secure relationships through consistent caring and love and by responding to the young child's cues [5]. When the child's temperament is very different from the parent's temperament, this difference can affect the relationship between the parent and child. A temperamentally easygoing child is more likely to relax, relate well to others, and show secure attachment. A temperamentally fretful or anxious infant may need more nurturing and a quiet environment before she is ready to socialize with others. The extra attention required to soothe a fretful baby may be difficult and make a parent feel inadequate. However, many experts believe that a child's temperament is already formed at birth and is not a sign of parental failure or success. Rather, temperament appears to be a reflection of the inborn traits of the child. Parents who understand those traits and learn how to guide them can effectively support the successful development of their child. Such inborn differences remind parents that they need different strategies to respond effectively to different children [4; 15].

Finally, it helps when parents are aware of environmental or prenatal conditions that might affect brain development and parent-child attachments. These prenatal conditions include eating right, taking prenatal vitamins, and getting plenty of rest. Mothers' drug or alcohol abuse can affect the unborn baby's neurological development and put infants at risk for low birth weight and disabilities. Maternal depression can interfere with the mother's ability to care for her baby. Trauma, including abuse and neglect that the mother may experience before the baby is born, can impair emotional development and lead to later aggressive behavior in children as they grow up [4; 5].

Parent-child attachment exerts a strong influence on the child's later social development.

Improvements in our understanding of the prenatal factors that may contribute to violent behavior have led to the development of a number of intervention programs for pregnant women. As parents, caregivers, teachers, and researchers become more aware of prenatal risk factors, preventive efforts are likely to grow.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about brain development and infant attachment?

Pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors can usually suggest resources and help parents assess whether a problem requires additional intervention.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Infant Child Care
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00392/n00392.html

Brain Development Research: What It Means for Children and Families
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00147/n00147.html

Brain Development in Young Children
http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnew497/pnew497b.html

When Babies and Toddlers Are in Child Care, Accreditation Is the Key to Quality
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00144/n00144.html

Early Childhood Violence Prevention
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/massey98.html

You Have until the Count of 3 to Shape Your Child's Future
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00009/n00009.html

Early Childhood Development and Learning: Ten Key Lessons
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/How_Children/IIEarlychildhood.html

Brain and Child Development
http://www.cpirc.org/tips/braindev.htm

Brain Development
http://www.nncc.org/Child.Dev/brain_nc.html

Nature, Nurture, and Early Brain Development
http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6115.htm

New Brain Development Research: What This Means to Parents: Beginning at the Beginning
http://www.nwrel.org/pirc/hot1.html

Brain Development in Infants and Toddlers: Information for Parents and Caregivers
http://www.nccic.org/cctopics/brain.html

Snapping Synapses in the Early Years
http://www.idra.org/Newslttr/1998/Apr/Bradley.htm#Art3

Impulse Control

How does impulse control fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Impulse control, sometimes called *self-regulation,* refers to a child's ability to control his or her behavior. It is natural for young children to show a mix of strong emotions such as excitement, joy, anger, frustration, and disappointment. An important part of growing up is learning how to show emotions at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Children who learn to control their anger or frustration, and who use words to express their feelings, get along better with others. Lack of impulse control and an inability to manage anger are often the cause of behavior problems in children and contribute to problems with friendships during the school years.

> *The abilities to delay gratification, inhibit inappropriate responses, and control anger help children form positive relationships with others.*

Children who have poor impulse control are also more likely to take greater risks and engage in dangerous behavior during adolescence and into adulthood [14]. Research suggests that children start to develop appropriate ways to control their impulses and regulate their behavior as early as 3 years of age [6]. Parents can reduce the chance of violence in children's lives by positively modeling and teaching children different ways to control their anger and impulses [27; 38].

Many young children commonly show their frustration and anger by hitting, screaming, or sometimes even biting. When parents calmly provide words to help children express their feelings and provide children with other strategies for meeting their needs, while at the same time maintaining firm and fair limits for behavior, they help children develop impulse control. For example, when parents see children taking a toy from another child, they might step in to discuss the feelings of others and the need to take turns. If a child gets mad playing a game and pushes or hits another child, parents should first make sure that the other child is safe, and then let both children know that hitting others is not permitted. Then parents might suggest words that the children could use to express their strong feelings. Parents can encourage children to consider the needs of others.

When parents suggest a reason for choosing one option over another, they are helping children develop empathy, self-control, and problem-solving abilities. These lessons in a young child's life form the basis of self-discipline. Early self-discipline or self-control is related to self-control later in childhood and throughout life [6].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's lack of self-control?

Child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are all likely to be able to suggest resources and help parents assess whether a problem requires additional intervention.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Helping Young Children Deal with Anger
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/marion97.html

Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html

Violence and Young Children's Development
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wallac94.html

Positive Discipline (Available in English, Spanish, and Chinese)
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1990/positi90.html

School Readiness: Parents and Professionals Speak on Social and Emotional Needs of Young Children
http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/library/1994/cfam-sr/resintro

Time Out for "Time Out"
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00194/n00194.html

Discipline: A Parent's Guide
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00203/n00203.html

Helping Your Child Learn Responsible Behavior
http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/library/1993/respons/contents.html

Biters: Why They Do It and What to Do about It
http://npin.org/library/1997/n00217/n00217.html

Appropriate Limits for Children: A Guide for Discipline
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/limits2.pdf

When Children Bite
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc16_children.bite.html

Guidance and Discipline: A Developmental Approach
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/guide.dev.apprch.html

Prosocial Skills

How do prosocial skills fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"Prosocial skills" is a broad term used to identify the behaviors people use to get along with others. When children learn *prosocial* skills, they learn to help and comfort others—especially their friends. Prosocial skills help a child to be empathetic and play well with other children. Some researchers believe that children are born with the ability to be empathetic and that this ability can be strengthened throughout childhood. Parents can influence their children's readiness to help others by setting an example of empathetic behavior. Parents who are loving and sympathetic, who show kindness and regard for the feelings of others, and who work to prevent their children's aggressive behavior are more likely to have children who are also kind, helpful, and concerned about the rights of others. The reverse is also true. Children with abusive parents are much less likely to help a child in need and more likely to become aggressive with other children [4].

Friendships are essential for a child's healthy development. Children without friends often experience serious problems throughout their lives [3]. Children who are rejected by other children may lack the social skills to make and keep friends. When children are asked why they might dislike another child, they often say it is because the child is aggressive [21]. On the other hand, empathetic children are more likely to maintain lasting friendships. This is because an empathetic child is developing a deeper sense of understanding and sensitivity to her friend's feelings.

Children learn prosocial skills partly by watching and interacting with other children and adults. Parents can support children's prosocial development in many ways. Parents become "social skills teachers" when they invite friends over or organize children's playgroups. Parents teach social skills and empathy when they talk to their child about being a host and thinking of their guests' needs. Parents teach prosocial skills when they talk with their child about fairness, taking turns, and sharing. Parents can encourage children to resolve their problems through compromise and discussion [37]. Parents teach empathy when they stop aggressive behaviors in young children and help the children discuss their feelings. Parents can also suggest appropriate choices as the children learn to resolve arguments. Choices might include:

> *Parents teach social competence when they respond to aggressive behaviors in young children, when they discuss feelings, and when they offer children appropriate strategies for interacting with others.*

- helping children use words to explain their own feelings and the feelings of others, and
- helping children find ways to resolve the conflict cooperatively without hitting or hurting others.

Encouraging children to be cooperative, caring, helpful, and considerate toward others is an important part of teaching violence prevention [3; 21].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's prosocial skills?

Child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are all likely to be able to suggest resources and help parents assess whether a problem requires additional intervention.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Assessing Young Children's Social Competence
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/2001/mcclel.html

Helping Young Children Deal with Anger
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/marion97.html

Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html

Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/hartup92.html

Violence and Young Children's Development
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wallac94.html

Understanding and Facilitating Preschool Children's Peer Acceptance
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/kemple92.html

Helping Young Children Make Friends at School
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew998/inte998a.html

In the Company of Friends
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00357/n00357.html

Pathways Project: An Interview with Gary Ladd
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew799/int799c.html

The Only Child
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00210/n00210.html

Making Friends
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00198/n00198.html

Sibling Relationships: An Interview with Laurie Kramer
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599b.html

Developing Social Skills
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc14_develop.social.skill.html

Children without Friends, Part 1: Their Problems
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc26_wo.friends1.html

Children without Friends, Part 2: The Reasons for Peer Rejection
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc31_wo.friends2.html

Children without Friends, Part 3: Learning about a Child's Strengths and Weaknesses
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc32_wo.friends3.html

Children without Friends, Part 4: Improving Social Skills
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/sac32_wo.friends4.html

Violence on Television and in Other Media

How does television violence fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

There is a lot of evidence that suggests that watching violent television programs has a powerful negative effect on children. The influence of TV violence might be seen immediately in a child's behavior. Sometimes it may not show in his or her behavior until years later. Researchers also suggest that children with emotional or impulse control problems may be more negatively affected by watching violent television programs [2].

There are three main areas where viewing television violence impacts children:

- *Television violence may teach children aggressive behavior and attitudes.* Violence is shown as attractive, effective, and a preferred way to solve problems on many television programs. This includes some popular children's shows. Children who watch a lot of television see many violent acts, many of which go unpunished. Heavy TV watchers are also more likely to become verbally or physically aggressive with others.
- *Television violence may increase a child's fear of the real world.* Children who watch a lot of violent programs believe the world is meaner and more dangerous than those who watch less television. These children may have more worries or fears.
- *Television violence may desensitize children to real violence.* Children who watch a lot of television gradually become less upset by the violence they see. Frequent TV watchers seem to become more accepting of violence. In some cases, children become less caring and less sensitive to others' pain and suffering [1; 22; 29].

Current research on violence in other media (video games, music videos, and movies) suggests that children who watch violent movies, play violent video games, and listen to violent music experience equally harmful effects. In his 1995 book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, a former West Point psychologist who specializes in promoting and controlling aggression through military discipline, shows how the military uses the research on violence. Grossman describes how violent video games are used in training new recruits to kill the enemy and to desensitize them to the suffering of others [11; 12; 19].

Children who view a lot of TV gradually become more tolerant of violence and may be more likely to use verbal or physical aggression with others.

Parents play an important role in controlling the amount of television their children watch. Parents can limit television viewing, especially viewing of violent shows. When children do watch television, their parents may want to sit with them to watch the program and discuss scenes that might be confusing. When parents are involved with what their children are watching on television, the children are more likely to make wise viewing choices.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the effects media violence has on their child?

Child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, and family counselors can provide insights and information. Parents can also contact station networks to register their concerns about inappropriate programming for children or to add their voices to the many organizations working to address the ill effects of media violence on children.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Television Violence: Content, Context, and Consequences
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/aidman97.html

Video Games: Research, Ratings, Recommendations
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/cesar98.html

Guidelines for Family Television Viewing
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1990/famtv90.html

Television Violence and Behavior: A Research Summary
http://npin.org/library/1997/n00155/n00155.html

Media Violence and Young Children
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00154/n00154.html

Children Now: Study Shows That Media Reinforces Gender Strait Jacket
http://www.childrennow.org/media//boystomen/index.html

Children and TV Violence
http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/violence.htm

Media Violence: Confronting the Issues and Taking Action
http://www.growsmartbrains.com/pages1/article5.html

Television, Violence, and Children
http://interact.uoregon.edu/medialit/fa/mlarticlefolder/kalin.html

Violence on Television: What Do Children Learn? What Can Parents Do?
http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/violence.html

Toys That Promote Violent Behavior

How do toys that promote violent behavior fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Children's fascination with war play and war toys is not new. Items resembling war toys date from ancient Egypt and the Middle Ages [8]. The fascination with such toys is not limited to children in the United States, but is common in many countries.

Children's television was deregulated in 1984. One result was a sudden rise in war-related cartoons and a rise in the sale of war toys linked to these programs. According to Diane Levin, author of *Remote Control Childhood?*, "within one year of deregulation, 9 of the 10 best-selling toys were connected to TV shows, and 7 of these shows were violent. The sale of toys of violence, including action figures with weapons, soared more than 600% in three years." Media "cross feeding" makes it possible for a child to view the same violent themes in a variety of media. Video games, movies, the Internet, children's books, and comic books may all show the same violent stories and characters [25].

To add to the problem, the war toys sold today look realistic [8]. Many of the war toys used by children in previous generations were less "purpose-specific." Children could use the toys in a variety of ways to invent their own stories or adventures. The children might use other props, such as the trees and natural elements in their own backyards. The war toy often became insignificant as the larger imaginary game unfolded. By comparison, many modern war toys have a single purpose. Instead of encouraging creativity and dramatic play, the toy encourages children to imitate the fighting or violence seen while watching a specific character or TV show [8; 9].

Parents and teachers of young children report the following negative behaviors of many children who play with war toys:

- an obsession or preoccupation with war play and with the products or programs that promote such play
- increased aggression among children when they imitate what they see in violent programs
- a lack of creativity and imagination when children play, because they are just copying what they see on television or in other media

> *'It seems reasonable to propose that the lessons children learn in early war play may become familiar and well-rehearsed strategies for resolving real-life conflicts with peers, siblings, or other associates.'*

Two researchers, Watson and Peng [44], have studied the relationship between toy gun play and children's aggressive behavior. They found that toy gun play was one predictor of aggression among young children in day care settings. Other important influences included children's TV viewing and how parents disciplined their children (including if the parents used physical punishment such as spanking). Researcher Gary Ladd notes that, "...parents who tolerate war play may be condoning (if not promoting) a context that breeds antisocial behaviors and values (e.g., aggression toward others, stereotyped views of good and evil). Expanding upon this argument, it seems reasonable to suggest that the lessons children learn in early war play may become familiar and well-rehearsed strategies for resolving real-life conflicts with peers, siblings, or other associates" ([24], pp. 403–404).

Parents can play an important role in encouraging their child's creative, nonviolent play. Parents can refuse to purchase toys that are models from current violent programs. They can also discourage relatives and friends from giving popular war toys as gifts. Instead, parents can provide or make toys from materials that encourage creativity and adventure play. For example, parents can provide inexpensive "dress-up" clothes resembling fire fighters, police officers, and historical figures—heroes and heroines—that reflect the family's cultural heritage. A children's librarian might suggest children's books or videos that are entertaining and educational and that will engage the child's imagination.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's use of toys in ways that seem to promote violent behavior?

In addition to child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors, parents can also contact toy manufacturers and retailers, and join organizations that work to address the ill effects of toys that promote violent behavior.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Playing with Guns, War Play, and Superheroes: What's the Big Deal?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew500/int500c.html

Children, War Toys, and Violent Games
http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/pubs/_f/f-114.pdf

Violent Toys, Nonviolent Toys: What's the Difference?
http://www.lionlamb.org/violent_toys.html

Make Cookies, Not War: TV-Related Toys and the "I Want That" Syndrome
http://www.growsmartbrains.com/pages1/article2.html

Parents Group Targets Violence-Themed Toys
http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/19990509goodtoys6.asp

Early Child Care Experiences

How do early child care experiences fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

High-quality early child care teaches children important social skills for healthy friendships. In addition, high-quality early child care helps children with their language and problem-solving abilities. Children who can communicate and work well with others generally have greater early school success.

As many as 13 million preschoolers (including 6 million babies and toddlers) spend time in the care of someone other than their parents ([13], p. 53). Research findings on the long-term effects of early care experiences have differed. The research is particularly confusing when researchers look at children's social development. Some studies suggest that children in early group care are more aggressive with their friends. Other studies say the opposite. These studies say that children are more sociable and more cooperative because they participated in early group care.

How can both of these outcomes be true? The short answer is that the impact of early child care on children depends on many factors. These factors include the quality of care (which is highly variable), a mother's or family's attitude toward working outside the home (e.g., the mother may not want to work), conditions of the mother's or father's job (e.g., stress, flexibility), and the presence of stressful family events (e.g., family or financial problems) [16; 26; 41].

It is important that children learn healthy social skills, such as self-control, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Children are more likely to learn those skills in child care settings that have small groups and an adequate teacher-student ratio. Also, children do better when the teachers are warm and responsive to children, use discipline techniques that help children solve problems, and intentionally model and teach social skills to children [16; 20; 33].

Children in high-quality early childhood programs also do better on verbal and reasoning tests when they enter school [31]. Children in high-quality early childhood programs had higher reading, math, and mental test scores from toddlerhood through age 21 and were more likely to be in school at age 21 than those who did not receive high-quality care [10]. Some of the effects of early child care are seen through the teen years and into adulthood. Although family characteristics and the mother-child relationship affect children's development more than experiences in child care do [31], we know that children who are at risk for school failure show many benefits from having high-quality child care. The converse is also true: children at risk for school failure suffer significantly if they are in poor-quality care [30; 35].

> *High-quality early care experiences provide essential social skills necessary for healthy relationships with others.*

Parents play a critical role in choosing a high-quality child care arrangement for their child. Parents usually look at the hours of operation, the location, and the cost when making their decision. Parents will also want to consider the provider's program and space where the children stay. These are the features that are likely to have an impact on children's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development. Other concerns include the ratio of adults to children, the size of the group of children, and the education and specialized training of the teachers. Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) exist in many communities in the United States to help parents find and select high-quality child care [36].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the quality of their child's early child care experiences?

Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) exist in all states and most large communities to help parents identify high-quality child care services. CCR&Rs also provide training and resources to early child care professionals to help them improve the quality of care for young children. In cases where parents have serious concerns about the level of care being provided, CCR&Rs can help them identify the appropriate agency for registering complaints.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Child Care: Is It Good for Children?
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599a.html

The Lasting Benefits of Preschool Programs
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00400/n00400.html

Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html

Infant Child Care
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1991/howes91.html

Understanding and Facilitating Preschool Children's Peer Acceptance
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/kemple92.html

Assessing Young Children's Social Competence
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/2001/mcclel.html

Recent Research on Mother/Child Attachment
http://npin.org/pnews/1995/pnewn95/pnewn95b.html

What Is a Quality Preschool Program?
http://www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/prschool.html

Teaching Children Not to Be—or Be Victims of—Bullies
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00142/n00142.html

New Study Finds Quality of Child Care Is Related to Children's School Success
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/int999b.html

High-Quality Child Care: Luxury Option or Standard Equipment?
http://npin.org/library/1997/n00148/n00148.html

High-Quality Child Care Again Linked to Fewer Juvenile Arrests
http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=35early.h19

America's Child Care Crisis: A Crime Prevention Tragedy
http://www.fightcrime.org/pdf/childcarereport.pdf

Family Child Care Study Guide: Socialization
http://www.nncc.org/Prof.Dev/fcc.curriculum/sg.ch3.html

Developing Social Skills
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc14_develop.social.skill.html

Choosing Child Care
http://www.nncc.org/Choose.Quality.Care/dc36_choose.care.html

Managing Family Conflict

How does the way families manage conflict fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Conflict, anger, and frustration are a normal part of life. Children learn their first lessons about how to get along with others and handle conflict, anger, and frustration from their family. Children watch how their parents, brothers, or sisters handle conflict and try to handle their problems the same way. If family conflict turns into domestic abuse, children are at great risk of physical and emotional abuse. They are also at risk for engaging in violent behavior as a teen and adult ([45], pp. 1, 6–8).

Children in homes where parents handle problems in a destructive manner—such as using verbal or physical aggression, showing disrespect, or withdrawing from one another—are more likely to be aggressive and have difficulty solving problems with their friends. When children live in homes where they see their parents handling their disagreements constructively by sharing, discussing, and resolving problems, they are more likely to use similar strategies with their friends [34]. Parents can help children learn to deal with their strong emotions, without using violence or aggression, by simply modeling appropriate ways to manage problems, disagreements, anger, and stress [28].

Research shows that parents can change unhealthy patterns of communicating and managing conflict. E. Mark Cummings, a specialist in research on marital conflict and peer relationships, says, "It is never too late to start handling your disagreements in better ways, for your own sake, for the sake of your marriage, and for the sake of your children. It is important that couples deal with their disagreements openly and calmly, respect and listen to one another, try to work toward a solution, and try not to let their anger get the better of them" [34].

One way parents can prevent the likelihood of disagreements and angry outbursts is by creating a dependable routine within a safe home environment. Routines reduce stress for young children so that they are less likely to feel frustrated or angry. Parents can encourage regular mealtimes, playtime, family activities, and sleep. If parents know about potential changes in the day's routine, they can inform the child, in advance, and reassure him about what to expect so that he will feel more secure.

> *Children in homes where parents address their disagreements in a constructive manner are more likely to use similar strategies in their interactions with peers.*

Young children also learn about cooperation, compromise, and conciliation from their brothers and sisters. Children who have older brothers and sisters who are helpful and kind with younger children also learn to be helpful and thoughtful. Likewise, children who have older brothers and sisters who are destructive and aggressive with younger children learn to behave in more aggressive, destructive ways with their friends. How conflict between brothers and sisters is resolved is very important. If brothers and sisters consistently resolve their disagreements in destructive ways, it may lead to later behavior problems in school [17].

One way that parents can help children learn how to handle their disagreements is by setting an example of resolving problems respectfully. Parents should not allow conflict or arguing to get "out-of-hand." Brothers and sisters can learn to handle their problems without hurting each other verbally or physically. Parents can help by suggesting other appropriate choices, and "using words" when their children are struggling. Abusive behavior that might lead to domestic violence should not be allowed, either between the parents or the children.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the ways their family manages conflict?

Family counselors, parent educators, pediatricians, and other health care professionals can provide information and suggest approaches for families to use to better manage conflict.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Early Childhood Violence Prevention
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/massey98.html

Violence and Young Children's Development
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wallac94.html

The Debate over Spanking
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/ramsbu97.html

Positive Discipline
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1990/positi90.html

Marital Relationships, Children, and Their Friends: What's the Connection?
An Interview with E. Mark Cummings
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew500/int500a.html

Sibling Relationships: An Interview with Laurie Kramer
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599b.html

How Can Parents Model Good Listening Skills?
http://www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/listenin.html

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00072/n00072.html

Children and Divorce: Part I
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/int999e.html

Children and Divorce: Part II
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/int1199a.html

Violence and the Family: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family
Executive Summary
http://www.apa.org/pi/viol&fam.html

Violence in the Family
http://www.health.org/nacoa/famviol.htm

Resolving Conflict Constructively and Respectfully
http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/hyg-fact/5000/5218.html

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The Middle Years

(6–12 years)

Developmental Overview

The middle years of childhood represent a period of enormous social growth and marked intellectual development. Children become noticeably better at logical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving during these years. With new skills in hand, children experiment with what they have learned at home as they venture into the outside world. They compare their skills, beliefs, and values with those of their friends and acquaintances. Feelings of self-worth are tested and reinforced daily as children search to find a place within their peer group. The habits developed and lessons learned during these years will strongly influence their overall health and their success at school, at work, and in relationships.

Children fine-tune their social skills during the elementary school years through practice, observation, and discussion. While the family remains the child's foundation and a critical source of emotional and physical security, children gradually increase the amount of time spent away from the family. The ability to enter into a group of peers, make and keep good friends, deal with teasing and provocation, manage conflict, and develop empathy for others becomes an essential aspect of their lives.

> *The ability to enter into a group of peers, make and keep good friends, deal with teasing and provocation, manage conflict, and develop empathy for others becomes an essential aspect of children's lives.*

Children's continuing social and intellectual development during the middle years often leads them to begin to question adult guidelines and expectations. Doing so helps children learn about themselves, express their individuality, and achieve a sense of autonomy. Patterns of family communication and parental discipline remain very important. A parenting approach that exercises considerable control, holds high but appropriate expectations for behavior, and demonstrates warmth and affection contributes to children's healthy development. When it encourages appropriate levels of responsibility and the use of reason and negotiation in resolving differences, this kind of approach accommodates the growing maturity of the child.

During the preschool years, parents control most of their child's connections with others, but during the middle years, children begin to expand the number and depth of their relationships with peers and other adults. Parents and families still remain central to providing children with a sense of belonging, a source of emotional and physical support, and consistent guidance, even while children gradually become more self-reliant [43].

This section of the *Guide* addresses areas in which parents have opportunities to encourage their child's healthy, caring development; increase their child's range of strategies to negotiate problems; and meet their child's emotional needs. The topics discussed in this section are peer relationships, popular entertainment media, appropriate after-school care and monitoring, encouraging school success, conflict management skills, and connections with caring people within the community.

As in the first section of this *Guide*, in these six areas a complex interplay of various conditions, including parental influence, may work to increase or decrease a child's risk for involvement in violence as perpetrator or victim. Each of these six areas is influenced by individual factors, family factors, school factors, peer-related factors, and neighborhood factors [26].

These areas are not meant to be a comprehensive list of the factors affecting aggression in children. Parenting style, family strengths, and biological functions such as temperament also contribute to patterns of aggression in children. These factors are discussed briefly in the introduction to this *Guide*. The areas discussed here, however, are ones in which there are particular risks that may contribute to the development of aggressive behavior in children and upon which parents can have a strong influence. Brief research summaries are included about each area to help parents understand the role each one plays in violence prevention. Resources follow, so that parents can find out where to get additional information and help.

Most parents can see the importance of social competence as children grow and develop. Prosocial skills are also discussed in the preschool section, and peer influences are discussed in more detail in the adolescence section.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Peer Relationships

How do peer relationships fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

During the school years, friendships are very important to the child's development. Friends are emotional and intellectual supports for children. Through friendships, children learn how to cooperate, solve problems, negotiate, resolve conflict, and manage stress. Children learn how to develop and sustain new relationships through their experiences with friends [25]. Given the number of hours that most children spend with their friends, it is not surprising that children who have healthy friendships report higher levels of self-esteem, emotional well-being, and school success. It is also not surprising that children who are disliked by other children report lower self-esteem and depression, and do less well in school. In fact, early signs of ongoing rejection by other children suggest that a child is at risk for a variety of poor outcomes later in life. Those risks include dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and mental health problems [3; 37].

Children who are consistently rejected by other children see the world as a hostile, unfriendly place. Rejected children may become loners or make friendships with other children who are antisocial or impulsive [6]. Unfortunately, ongoing rejection may lead to a negative cycle during the middle years. Aggressiveness leads to rejection by others, which in turn leads the child to find other antisocial children. These groups of children become the training ground for later delinquency [14]. In fact, aggressive-rejected boys are a significant part of the "early-starting antisocial group," a relatively small group that accounts for nearly half of all adolescent delinquency ([15], p. 831).

A recent Surgeon General's report on youth violence defines the terms "early-onset" and "late-onset" violence. People who commit their first act of serious violence as a child and do not outgrow aggressive behavior are defined as having "early-onset" violence. "Late-onset" violence describes people who commit their first act of violence as an adolescent. The early-onset group represents only a small percentage of the population who may go on to commit violence as an adult. However, researchers believe that early identification and intervention can go a long way in preventing future acts of aggression, particularly for children who have problems with aggression [11].

Rejected children are more likely to become loners or make friendships with other children who are antisocial or impulsive.

Parents and caregivers can help children with making healthy friendships by simply encouraging them to play with other children during their free time. In some neighborhoods, children can still wander down to a friend's house or ride bicycles in the street, but in a growing number of communities, this type of informal free time is not possible. However, parents may want to get together to supervise free play at the neighborhood park, within their own homes, or at local recreation centers. As with most other skills, children learn about good friendships through practice. The more time children have to be together, with an adult available to provide needed supervision, the more likely it is that children will learn healthy negotiation skills and develop healthy social groups.

Bullying is another pattern that may appear during the middle years (or it may also begin as early as preschool). Bullying includes a particular set of aggressive behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, or stealing. The aggressive behaviors are a way of physically or psychologically intimidating others. Bullies need to feel powerful and in control, and they may gain satisfaction from harming people or animals. They may show little empathy for their victims. Those who repeatedly bully others may also become defiant toward adults. The bully will often disregard rules at school and become antisocial [4]. Acts of bullying are usually related to feelings of peer rejection [14], and research suggests that children who regularly bully others may have difficulty maintaining good relationships as adults [4]. Research also indicates that bullies are selective. They tend to not choose people who are total "wimps," but rather those people who may react but do not really put up strong resistance. It is important for parents to be on the lookout for bullying or victimization in their children, and to intervene accordingly.

The interaction of several sets of factors is considered largely responsible for aggressiveness and bullying in children. One set of factors includes poor child-rearing practices such as lack of warmth and caring from parents, inadequate limits for child behavior, or harsh discipline methods. Another set of factors includes the child's temperament and activity level. Other factors, such as violence and bullying behavior seen on TV and in other media and the acceptance of bullying by friends and other adults, might be viewed as environmental [40].

Many children who bully simply outgrow the behavior. However, the outlook for those who do not is troubling. One study looked at 870 third-grade children in the Midwest. The researchers found that children who were unusually aggressive at 8 years old had a one-in-four chance of having a criminal record at age 30, as compared to the one-in-twenty chance most children have. This study also found that children who were bullies were more likely to be convicted of serious crimes later in life. They had more moving traffic violations and convictions for drunken driving. They were more likely to have been high school dropouts or not to have had school success. Adults who were childhood bullies were also more abusive to their spouses and children and had children who were more often bullies themselves. The results of this compelling study "were independent of children's social class and IQ at age 8" ([40], p. 80).

Boys are more likely to physically bully. Girls are more likely to focus their aggression on relationship issues with their friends. This kind of aggression, defined as "relational aggression," is done with the intention of hurting another child's feelings and her place within a social group. Although relational aggression is more typical of girls, it is not exclusive to girls. The physical aggression that is more characteristic of boys has received much attention in recent years. Relational aggression also may contribute to social and emotional problems including loneliness, depression, poor self-esteem, and rejection. While boys and girls may show their aggression or cruelty in different ways, the impact on their social and emotional development can be equally damaging [16; 17; 18].

> *While boys and girls may exhibit their aggression or cruelty in different ways, the impact on their social and emotional development can be equally damaging.*

The future of childhood bullies is not necessarily bleak. Getting help and support at home and in school, early in life, has been shown to help prevent the onset of violence [40]. Effective prevention includes schoolwide strategies for aggressive behavior that are clearly stated and enforced for everyone, and understandable consequences for any misbehavior. Parents also play an important role by taking bullying behaviors seriously and responding in ways that discourage aggressive tendencies. This will help to prevent early bullying behaviors from evolving into something more serious [40].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's peer relationships?

School counselors or social workers, teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are good sources of information and support about peer relationships.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00372/n00372.html

Bullying in Schools
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00416/n00416.html

Bullying Resource List
http://ericeece.org/pubs/reslist/bully01.html

Easing the Teasing
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1999/freed99.html

Girls, Aggressive?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew700/int700d.html

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00072/n00072.html

Keeping Schoolyards Safe from Bullies
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOCS/bullies.htm

Violence and Violence Prevention: A Review of the Literature
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/litrview.htm

Teaching Children Not to Be—or Be Victims of—Bullies
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00142/n00142.html

Aggression and Cooperation: Developing Constructive Strategies
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html

Mobbing, Bullying, and Peer Rejection
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOCS/mob_bull.htm

Loneliness in Young Children
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/bulloc98.html

Children without Friends, Part 1: Their Problems
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc26_wo.friends1.html

Children without Friends, Part 2: The Reasons for Peer Rejection
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc31_wo.friends2.html

Children without Friends, Part 3: Learning about a Child's Strengths and Weaknesses
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc32_wo.friends3.html

Children without Friends, Part 4: Improving Social Skills
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/sac32_wo.friends4.html

Bullying in School: It Doesn't Have to Happen
http://www.britannica.com/bcom/magazine/article/0,5744,228177,00.html

What Should Parents and Teachers Know about Bullying?
http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/e-resources/ebooks/records/834.html#top

Boys and Girls Are Cruel to Each Other in Different Ways—But Effects Are Equally Harmful
http://www.apa.org/releases/cruel.html

What about Girls? Are They Really Not Aggressive?
http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/bulletin/volume.3/bull26b.htm

Popular Entertainment Media

How does popular entertainment fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Children today are immersed in the popular entertainment media. The average American child grows up in a home that has three TVs, three tape players, three radios, two VCRs, two CD players, one video game player, and one computer. American children spend almost 38 hours a week using entertainment media of all types outside of school or for homework [30].

Television, music, movies, video games, and the Internet are powerful teachers. Together they are often defined as the popular media. Media can broaden our children's world in productive ways or expose our children to harmful images. In his book *Selling Out America's Children: How America Puts Profits before Values—and What Parents Can Do,* David Walsh [46] talks about the harmful messages children learn from popular media. The messages include the acceptance of violence. For example, the average child in the United States sees over 200,000 acts of violence on television by the time he or she is 18 years old. Many popular shows encourage aggressive and disrespectful behavior. Walsh notes that there is glorification of an "in your face" approach to relationships that shows aggression and disrespect as funny and attractive. Images of violence in the popular media contribute to what some have called the "socially toxic environment" of today's youth. This glorification of violence is believed by many researchers to contribute to children's violent behavior [22; 23].

Reviews of the effects of violent television shows on children overwhelmingly confirm the negative consequences of violent programs [1]. Movies and violent videos, which are often more graphic than cable or broadcast TV, also have an effect on children. When children have a steady diet of violent graphic images, they can become desensitized to real violence [12; 31; 35].

In addition, boys and girls may learn different lessons about violence and aggression from the popular media. Boys learn that violence in the pursuit of justice is acceptable and perhaps even desirable. The violence shows that boys are strong and macho [31]. Girls, on the other hand, learn that men often abuse women. Many of the stories in movies, music videos, and popular music show images of women enjoying sexual aggression. Some research suggests that these violent images contribute to attitudes that are tolerant of rape and other forms of sexual abuse in real life [31].

> *Popular media are powerful teachers of our youth.*

Parents can help children make better use of media by setting media time limits for watching TV and videotapes, playing video and computer games, and surfing the Internet. Parents can also set family guidelines for media content. Television sets, VCRs, video games, and computers should be kept out of children's bedrooms to increase the likelihood that family guidelines are followed. Parents should also try, whenever possible, to use popular media as a part of a family activity [2].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the effects of popular entertainment on their child?

The entertainment industry, cable and commercial station networks, manufacturers of music and game videos, advertisers, and retailers who are part of marketing media violence to youth are part of the problem, but they are also responsive to parents' complaints. If parents are concerned that their child may be unusually affected by aggressive or violent shows, or has a lot of difficulty breaking away from television, they may wish to talk with their child's school counselor or a psychologist.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Video Games: Research, Ratings, Recommendations
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00366/n00366.html

Television Violence: Content, Context, and Consequences
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/aidman97.html

Television Violence and Behavior: A Research Summary
http://npin.org/library/1997/n00155/n00155.html

Are Our Boys All Right?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew300/int300a.html

Parents Guide to the Internet
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00005/n00005.html

Kids & Media @ the New Millennium: Some Findings
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew500/int500d.html

Is Media Violence Invading Your Home?
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/pmedia.htm

Violent Kids: Can We Change the Trend?
http://www.nifi.org/violent.html

Children Now's Boys to Men: Entertainment Media
http://www.childrennow.org/media/boystomen/index.html

Taming the Media Violence Hysteria
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/hysteria.htm

The Influence of Music and Rock Videos
http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/musicvid.htm

More Chills Than Thrills: Protecting Children from Frightening Mass Media
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599e.html

The Parent's Guide: Use TV to Your Child's Advantage
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00049/n00049.html

Selling Out America's Children: How America Puts Profits before Values and What Parents Can Do
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/int1198d.html

Appropriate After-School Care and Monitoring

How does the availability of after-school care and monitoring fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Almost five million children are home alone after school hours. These children are in families where both parents are working outside the home. The after-school hours are when violent juvenile crime peaks and when youth are most likely to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and sex [13; 47]. Some older children successfully care for themselves after school for an hour or two until a parent comes home. However, it is not surprising that children and youth who begin their self-care earlier, and spend more time on their own, are significantly more likely to take risks.

Some parents do not use after-school programs because they are not available or because they are expensive or of poor quality. However, children gain important benefits from high-quality after-school programs. Some of the benefits include stronger friendships, enhanced emotional adjustment, and better grades and behavior during school hours [33]. Studies suggest that when older children and young teens attend enriching after-school activities, they are less likely to get involved in risky behavior. They are also more likely to have higher self-esteem and higher grades and are usually better able to handle conflict than youth in self-care [33; 36; 47]. Enriching after-school activities can provide children with the time they need to develop important relationships with their friends or with other caring adults. Children can also mentor younger children or learn more about their community and culture in after-school programs [24].

The term "after-school programs" is a broad term that includes a variety of programs. After-school programs might include activities at the home of a family member or neighbor. They may also include unstructured "drop-in" programs that are offered by community organizations. Licensed programs that are located at schools have may highly structured activities and also help with homework. Some neighborhoods use both school and community resources in a combined program [24]. The Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP) is one example of a promising integrated after-school program for youth. QOP is a multi-service project that includes education and tutoring, mentoring, life-skills training, and community service projects [34]. Outcomes from this after-school project include reduced delinquency and decreased juvenile crime.

> *Studies suggest that preadolescents and young teens who attend enriching after-school activities are less likely to engage in risky behavior and are more likely to have higher self-esteem and higher grades.*

Many different individuals and groups can provide successful after-school programs. However, parents will want to look for some of the important features of a high-quality after-school program. High-quality programs include clear goals and intended outcomes. The program content is both age-appropriate and challenging. There are opportunities for active learning in a positive and safe environment where there are adequate materials and facilities. The staff is well-prepared and culturally competent. The program should include diverse groups of children and adolescents and encourage parental involvement. Staff will show a willingness to work with other community resources and partners and to continually evaluate and improve their services [34].

Older children and young teens may resist programs that look too much like child care or activities that appear to be "too supervised." Parents may also feel uncertain about how much freedom is needed for older children and youth. However, the Research Institute on Addictions suggests that healthy youth development requires a lot of adult supervision. Their recent report indicates that when children are raised in a family that has lots of empathy, and parents actively monitor their children's activities, the children will have fewer problem behaviors. According to sociologist Grace Barnes: "Monitoring means knowing where your kids are, who their friends are, when they are coming in, and so on" [5]. The research also notes a critical gap between supervision of boys and girls. Although boys are more likely than girls to have risky behavior, have serious accidents, and engage in criminal activity, boys are monitored much less than girls.

Since there is such a great need for high-quality after-school care programs, the U.S. Department of Education has created a number of funding programs (see the resources at the Department's Web site: http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc/). Other groups involved in increasing national awareness of after-school care and monitoring include the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) and the *National School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan* developed by the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids coalition. This coalition is led by police chiefs, sheriffs, and attorneys from around the country. Members of the Fight Crime coalition believe that the development of high-quality after-school programs for older children and teens is the best way to "shut down the prime time for juvenile crime" ([32], pp. 68–72).

> *The development of high-quality after-school programs for older children and teens is the best way to 'shut down the prime time for juvenile crime.'*

Parents play an important role in keeping their own children and the children in their community safe. One way a parent can help is by supporting efforts to increase the number of after-school care programs in their community. Sometimes a parent has no option but to have the child in self-care after school. In those situations, the parent should take steps to prepare the child for the responsibility and be sure that the child knows what to do and whom to contact in case of an emergency.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the availability of after-school care for their child?

Local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) can assist parents in understanding their after-school program options. CCR&Rs typically have information about subsidies available to help parents pay for care as well as resources on how to know when a child is ready for self-care. Parents can also talk with their child's school principal or the local school board to encourage the development of after-school programming within the elementary and middle school settings.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Enriching Children's Out-of-School Time
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1999/coltin99.html

After-School Programs for Urban Youth
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig114.html

Urban After-School Programs: Evaluations and Recommendations
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig140.html

Latchkey Children
http://npin.org/pnews/pnew597/pnew597e.html

Perspectives on Rural Child Care
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00019/n00019.html

Expanded After-School Options Still Leave Parents with Tough Choices
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew900/int900c.html

Planning for Children in Self-Care
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/1998/n00028/n00028.html

The Potential of After-School Programs
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/chapter1.html

When School Is Out
http://www.futureofchildren.org/

Fact Sheet on School-Age Children's Out-of-School Time
http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/factsht.html

Afterschool.gov
http://www.afterschool.gov/

Bring Education to After-School Programs
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/After_School_Programs/

Safe and Smart
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/

Working for Children and Families: Safe and Smart After-School Programs
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/SafeSmart/

Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters/

Beyond the Bell Toolkit
http://www.ncrel.org/after/bellkit.htm

Report on Youth Violence Indicates Need for After-School Care
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew198/pnew198h.html

Encouraging School Success

How does school success fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"Falling behind in school and frequent truancy are strong predictors of dropping out and are associated with all the high-risk behaviors" ([20], p. 29).

There is a connection between poor school performance and risky behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, teen sexual activity, and violence. This connection suggests that if a child has a pattern of early school failure that includes frequent absenteeism, then the child is more likely to get involved in risky behaviors. Those behaviors include dropping out of school, criminal activity, and violence. However, children who succeed and are attached to the school through their friendships are less likely to get involved in serious crime, substance abuse, or violence. Successful children are often linked to the school through school activities, such as clubs, music, or athletics [20; 27]. Children who have a commitment to school can usually recover from an occasional "set-back" with friends or grades.

> *When parents are consistently present at their child's parent-teacher conferences and school activities and available when teachers have problems or concerns, their son or daughter is more likely to see that education is important.*

Parents provide a lasting and important support that can contribute to their child's school success and emotional growth. Parents can attend their child's parent-teacher conferences and school activities. Parents should also be available when teachers have problems or concerns. When children see their parents and teachers working together, they begin to understand that education is important. It is also less likely that children will have ongoing difficulties or "slip through the cracks." School success does not mean that every child is an "A" student. But all students should feel that they are making progress that is consistent with their abilities. Students should also feel that their school environment is safe and caring with lots of opportunities to make lasting friendships [27].

Parents can influence several areas that impact a student's successful school experience. These areas include:

Connectedness: Students' attachment to caring adults such as parents, grandparents, teachers, or mentors. For example, keeping the child with the same teacher for two or more grade levels, called "looping," often improves the child's school success and encourages lasting friendships.

Competency: The developing ability to solve problems, make friends, and make independent decisions. For example, parents can encourage their child to participate in an organized activity such scouting, sports, or playing an instrument.

Aspirations: The ability to set goals and develop strategies for a successful future. For example, rather than simply going out and buying a pet for a child, parents might help him or her understand the commitment of caring for a pet by reading books from the local library. Then parents can help the child make a daily schedule for pet care, including a plan that identifies the steps for achieving the goal of owning a pet.

Effective schools: A supportive, safe learning environment that challenges all students to excel. For example, parents can stay involved with the school by belonging to their parent-school organization or by expressing their willingness to help on school improvement committees. Parents bring an important voice to the table that helps school staff understand the many issues that may be affecting students' learning [20].

Parents also play an important role in helping teachers identify any possible learning and social difficulties in their child. Some schools may hesitate to intervene unless a child's school performance is lagging two or more grade levels behind similarly aged students. However, the evidence suggests that early intervention is critical. The farther behind a student falls in his or her school performance, the more likely the student will fail and begin to develop the sense of hopelessness that leads to risky behaviors [20].

> *While some schools may hesitate to intervene unless a child's academic performance is lagging two or more grade levels behind their peers, the evidence suggests that early intervention is critical.*

Parents are an important part of their child's teaching team. Parents can help teachers spot potential problems early on by sharing their concerns if they feel that their child is struggling in school. Parents can also help by sharing important parts of their child's history and their view of their child's personality and abilities. These are qualities about the child that may not be seen in the classroom setting. Parents can also take the lead and ask for an assessment if they are concerned that their child might have a learning disability or another undiagnosed condition. When parents, teachers, and school staff work together, most difficulties can be resolved and strategies can be developed that will support a successful educational experience.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's successful school experience?

Teachers, principals, special education coordinators or support staff, school counselors, school superintendents, pediatricians or other health care providers, parenting educators, other parents, and the child are important sources of information and support.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Resources on the Web

When Retention Is Recommended, What Should Parents Do?
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/robert97.html

If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School, What Can Teachers and Parents Do?
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/rober97b.html

Failure Syndrome Students
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/brophy98.html

Preventing and Resolving Parent-Teacher Differences
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1996/lketal96.html

When Should Parents Contact the Teacher? How Effective Parent-School Partnerships Can Prevent School Difficulties
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/feat1199.html

How Parents and Peers Influence School Success
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew900/int900e.html

Reducing the Risk of Failure by Easing Transitions and Providing Connections within the School Environment
http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnewo97/pnewo97h.html

Toward More Productive Parent-Teacher Conferences
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/int1198c.html

Teacher-Parent Partnerships
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/swick92.html

Learning Disabilities: Glossary of Some Important Terms
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00162/n00162.html

Position Statement: Student Grade Retention
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00348/n00348.html

Grade Repetition/Social Promotion—What the Research Indicates
http://ericae.net/faqs/grade_rep/grade_rep.htm#Digests

Homework—Policies, Practices, and Guides for Helping Parents and Teachers to Help Students
http://ericae.net/faqs/homework.htm

ADD/ADHD: What Does It Mean for Parents and Families when Their Child Is Diagnosed with This Condition?
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew598/pnew598d.html

Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD) and Children's School Performance
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/feat999.html

Conflict Management Skills

How do conflict management skills fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Getting along with peers and successfully resolving conflicts are two important skills for children to learn, especially during the middle years as children gradually become more concerned about friends and being accepted into a peer group [19; 41]. There is a relationship between peer rejection and aggression in children that has been heavily researched [41] and discussed earlier in this *Guide*. The problem is that it is hard to establish what comes first—the hostility that leads to rejection, or the reverse. Those children who treat other children in a hostile or angry way will have difficulty making or keeping friends and belonging to a peer group where aggression is not accepted. Parents need to help children learn new skills to make healthy friendships.

Children learn and practice negotiation and conflict management skills through playing with their friends, by watching how their parents talk and manage disagreements, and through their relationships with brothers and sisters. Children who are aggressive are often rejected by other children who have better coping skills. Aggressive children may become loners or find their way into a group of children who have the same difficulty with skills of negotiation, compromise, and discussion. Unfortunately, this behavior is likely to create a cycle leading to further hostility, antagonism, and social rejection [41].

Many teachers are concerned about the limited resources available to teach children how to resolve disputes without aggressive language, postures, or violent actions [9; 10]. In response to this need, violence prevention curricula and conflict resolution programs have been developed and tried in schools to help teach children basic conflict management skills [28; 45]. These school-based programs vary in techniques and outcomes. The most successful programs view conflict as a naturally occurring process necessary for human growth and development [29]. Research suggests that students trained in conflict management and peer mediation are more likely to use a problem-solving approach to resolving conflicts. For example, they might focus on a joint goal rather than a personal one [29]. In one research study, students who did not receive training in conflict resolution and peer mediation were more likely to withdraw from conflict rather than try to resolve it appropriately. Untrained students were also more likely to use coercion, manipulation, or intimidation in their approach to conflict. Positive outcomes for students who learn to resolve conflicts constructively include higher levels of self-esteem, mental health, self-regulation, and resilience [38].

> *Parents and families play a critical role in fostering effective responses to conflict by modeling appropriate negotiating strategies.*

Conflict resolution strategies are also learned at home. Parents and families play a critical role in fostering responses to conflict by modeling appropriate negotiating strategies. Parents can listen to their children, use developmentally appropriate negotiation, and compromise as a way to discipline. Parents should also refrain from physically aggressive discipline such as slapping or spanking. They might also give reasons for rules and request rather than demand compliance when it is appropriate. When children see their parents using negotiation skills, they are more likely to learn to use compromise and negotiation during difficult moments with their brothers and sisters, as well as with their friends [19; 44].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's conflict management skills?

School counselors or social workers, teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are excellent sources of information and support in this area.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Resources on the Web

Helping Young Children Deal with Anger
http://npin.org/library/2000/n00450/n00450.html

Easing the Teasing
http://npin.org/library/2000/n00440/n00440.html

School Violence Prevention
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/digests/ed379786.htm

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/1998/n00072/n00072.html

Understanding Violent Acts in Children: An Interview with Dr. Edward Taylor
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew998/featu998.html

A Community Guide to Youth—Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Programs
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00076/n00076.html

Trends in Peace Education
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed417123.html

Peer Conflicts in the Classroom
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wheele94.html

Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/int1198a.html

Pathways Project: An Interview with Gary Ladd
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew799/int799c.html

Creating the Peaceable School: A Comprehensive Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/spot1198.html

Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Curricula
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig97.html

Cooperation, Conflict Resolution, School Violence: A Systems Approach
http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices05.html

Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/conflict/docs/cre/tableoc.htm

Youth Violence & Conflict Resolution, Chinook Newsletter, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension
http://www.uwyo.edu/AG/CES/NEWLTRS/Bsnov94.PDF

Helping Young Adolescents Cope with Stress
http://www.nncc.org/SACC/sac42_adolesc.stress.html

Caring Connections

How do caring connections fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Resilience is defined as the ability to face, overcome, and be strengthened by adversity. Information on resilience in children discusses "protective factors" in the family, school, and community that can help reverse or minimize poor outcomes for children. For example, one protective factor for children is having a multigenerational network of friends, teachers, and relatives [8]. Resilient children frequently spend more time in a few extracurricular activities (rather than a little time in several activities), and they develop meaningful relationships with others. Consequently, they have a larger group of people to turn to for support or advice in times of trouble [8].

Building protective factors into a child's life includes making sure there is a "caring and supportive relationship with at least one person" and "ample opportunities to participate in and contribute meaningfully to one's social environment" ([21], p. 2). The SEARCH Institute, a nonprofit organization that supports the healthy development of children and teens, has researched resilience and protective factors. In their survey of over 100,000 youth in 200 communities, they found that caring and connecting with others are critical building blocks for healthy development. At this point, SEARCH has identified 40 critical factors or "assets." The more assets that are present in a child's life, the easier it is for the child to resist risky behaviors. Assets also help promote the child's positive attitudes and activities. The list of assets can be split into two different groups. "External" assets focus on positive experiences that children receive from their families, peers, teachers, and other community supports in their lives. "Internal" assets focus on the internal strengths, values, and commitments needed to make responsible choices and decisions.

SEARCH has also identified a growing number of "deficits" in children's lives. When a child has a number of deficits present in his life, it may be more difficult for the child to resist taking harmful risks. Deficits include watching TV for more than three hours a day and spending long periods of time at home alone. SEARCH found that children and teens who have between 20 and 30 external and internal assets, along with fewer than 3 deficits, are less likely to participate in unhealthy, risk-taking behaviors [7]. The lengthy list of possible assets and deficits in a child's life is on the SEARCH Web site (http://www.search-institute.org). The majority of youth who had 10 or fewer assets said they were involved in 3 or more violent acts in the previous year. Only a minority of youth having 31 or more assets reported participating in violence. This pattern seems to remain consistent with children surveyed across the country. Youth with fewer assets and more deficits are more likely than others to be involved in substance abuse, sexual activity, depression and attempted suicide, violence and other antisocial behavior, school problems, and gambling [39].

Important to the child's resilience is the presence of a multigenerational network of friends, teachers, and relatives.

Understanding that the community can be a unique network of support, where relationships and resources are shared, helps us see that our children benefit from being connected to the community as they grow. Outcomes for children and youth are better when communities support their "Constructive Use of Time" through participation in leadership and service activities that promote positive values ([39], p. 39). A study of a number of Chicago neighborhoods showed that overall violence was reduced, even in the poorest neighborhoods, when community residents raised their level of involvement with youth and increased the number of positive activities for children [42]. When parents work with other neighbors to build a safe environment and then encourage their children to connect to their community in meaningful ways, it helps to develop positive outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's caring connections?

Religious leaders and clergy, school counselors, local youth clubs, YMCA/YWCAs, park district organizations, Boy/Girl Scouts, and the Urban League offer information and resources to parents concerned about these issues.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Turning It All Around: From Risk to Resilience
http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/dig126.html

Cultivating Resilience: An Overview for Rural Educators and Parents
http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/edorc945.html

Enriching Children's Out-of-School Time
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1999/coltin99.html

Building a Healthy Community
http://npin.org/pnews/pnew197/pnew197c.html

SEARCH Institute's Asset Approach: Protecting Youth through Community Collaboration
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/spot999.html

Extracurricular Activities in Children's Lives
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/int1199c.html

The Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org/

Learning How to Care: A Paradigm Shift in School, Home, and Community
http://npin.org/library/2000/n00471/n00471.html

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The Teen Years
(13–18 years)

Developmental Overview

Adolescence marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Physical growth in early adolescence is rapid, and hormonal changes are typically greater than at any other age [17]. The teen years are often divided into the stages of *early adolescence,* ages 10 or 11 through age 14; *middle adolescence,* ages 15 and 16; and *late adolescence,* ages 17 through 19.

In early adolescence, children usually begin to worry about their appearance, become more moody because of hormonal changes, and focus on friendships. In middle adolescence, teens gradually become more comfortable with themselves and others. However they may begin to push family boundaries and experiment with new behaviors. By late adolescence, most teenagers have reached their adult height and are beginning to focus on independence and relationships apart from the family [17]. During these three stages of teen development, almost every part of the body is affected by the surge of growth, including the skeletal, muscular, and reproductive systems. Rapid growth, along with the difference in growth patterns, can create anxieties in teenagers. Popular media like television and movies often contribute to an adolescent's negative view of his or her body.

Six areas in which parents can help their teenager develop healthy relationships and recognize and resist dangerous influences:

organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement
substance use
access to weapons and guns
peer influences
dating relationships
transitions to adulthood

Teens show their independence and individuality by questioning, arguing, disputing, and at times rejecting their parents' opinions and beliefs. They also spend more time with friends and away from home than in earlier years. Despite their occasionally rebellious attitudes, teenagers still value their families and firm rules more than they are likely to admit. Parents who have consistently provided support and guidance for their children throughout the early childhood and middle years are likely to see their parenting efforts pay dividends. Their teens will likely respond to rules appropriately, despite some grumbling, and navigate peer influences more successfully than those children who have not experienced family support and guidance. However, if parents suddenly become lax in expectations, or if the family has a history of inconsistent family guidelines, their teenagers may feel lost, unsafe, and unprotected. They may also find themselves in dangerous situations with little understanding of the consequences.

In this section, we suggest six areas in which parents have opportunities to help their teenager develop healthy relationships and recognize and resist dangerous influences. These include: organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement; substance use; access to weapons and guns; peer influences; dating relationships; and successful transitions from adolescence to young adulthood.

How teens are impacted by these six areas is interrelated and complex. The five domains of influence that are mentioned in the previous sections also impact teenagers. Those domains include individual factors, family factors, school factors, peer-related factors, and community and neighborhood factors [19].

A comprehensive list of issues affecting aggression in youth is beyond the scope of this *Guide*. Instead, we focus on a few issues upon which parents' actions can have a significant impact. Factors that can contribute to patterns of aggression, such as parenting style, family strengths, temperament, and learning disabilities, are mentioned in the introduction to this *Guide*. In this section, brief research summaries are included to help parents understand the role each issue plays in violence prevention. A list of resources follows, so that parents know where to get additional information and help.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Organized Activities, Volunteerism, and Community Involvement

How do organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"The most relevant fact for education against violence is that teaching self-restraint and responsible conduct is most successful when young people are positively involved in some other activities, rather than when they are only asked to refrain from what they are tempted to do" ([15], p. 57).

Healthy teen development is supported by participating in organized activities and volunteering in the community. In a recent article in *American Psychologist,* Reed Larson [27] notes that "structured, voluntary youth activities," such as sports, arts, music, participation in organizations, community service, and other hobbies, are associated with a variety of positive outcomes for teens. Some of the outcomes include decreased delinquency and greater school achievement, increased self-control, increased initiative, and selflessness. Young people who volunteer are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, vandalism, and skipping school [16]. At the same time, parents should guard against overscheduling activities, given the increased amount of homework in high school and the importance of family time [23]. Clearly, teenagers should be encouraged to balance their lives with activities related to school, family, and community service. This balance will vary for individual teenagers.

Adolescence is also a time when young people, particularly girls, are likely to be self-absorbed. In girls, this is a characteristic that is sometimes described as a developmental stage rather than a problem. Volunteer work, good deeds for neighbors, and political action help teenage girls move beyond themselves into the larger world [42]. Volunteer work and social action may also help prevent cynicism, depression, and narcissism [43]. These kinds of activities are often viewed as a link between school and employment that builds an adolescent's understanding of the world of work [7; 16].

Several experts have noted that teenagers with a religious commitment are more likely to be involved in service activities. Commitment to a faith community appears to provide an anchor for teens [18]. "The adults in our churches and community made children feel valued and important," says Marian Wright Edelman. "They took time and paid attention to us. They struggled to find ways to keep us busy. And while life was often hard and resources scarce, we always knew who we were and that the measure of our worth was inside our heads and hearts and not outside in our possessions or on our backs" ([14], p. 5).

> *Volunteer work, good deeds for neighbors, and political action help youth move beyond themselves into the larger world.*

For some families, a sense of purpose and worth comes from a religious perspective. For other families, it may come from another belief system or ideology. Volunteer work on social justice or environmental issues, for example, can also provide an important sense of purpose and instill lifelong values in adolescents [18]. Volunteering and community service may also help teens develop relationships with civic-minded adults and friends that will lead to the development of a community-oriented identity [22].

Parent partnerships with schools and community organizations should not stop when the child becomes a teenager. Ongoing parental involvement is key to setting an example of the importance of school and community commitment. These valuable connections become some of the "building blocks of human development" that contribute to healthy outcomes for children and adolescents ([5], p. xiv).

Parents can encourage their teen's volunteer efforts by becoming personally involved in community service. Parents can talk about community issues and needs while paying attention to the social issues that captivate their teenager. Parents can also encourage their teenager to think of ways to solve community problems and attend community and cultural events with their children [24].

Who can parents talk to if they have concerns about their child's participation in structured voluntary activities?

School counselors, representatives of religious organizations, local youth clubs, YMCA/YWCAs, park district organizations, Boy/Girl Scouts, and the Urban League will have good ideas about how to get children involved in their communities.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Urban Youth in Community Service: Becoming Part of the Solution
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed351425.html

Volunteerism and Youth: What Do We Know?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew100/spot100.html

Extracurricular Activities in Children's Lives
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/int1199c.html

SEARCH Institute's Asset Approach: Protecting Youth through Community Collaboration
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/spot999.html

Impacts and Effects of Service-Learning
http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu/res/bibs/imps.htm

Ups and Downs of Adolescence: Youth Community Service
http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/fcs/upsdowns/upsjan99.htm

Preventing Problems vs. Promoting the Positive: What Do We Want for Our Children?
http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/posdev.pdf

Developing Empathy in Children and Youth
http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/7/cu13.html

America's Teenage Volunteers
http://www.indepsec.org/programs/research/teenvolun1.pdf

What Role Can Churches Play in At-Risk Prevention?
http://www.search-institute.org/archives/tff.htm

Substance Abuse

How does drug or alcohol abuse fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"Apart from being unhealthy behaviors, drug use and alcohol use reduces self-control and exposes children and youth to violence, either as perpetrators, as victims, or both" ([13], p. 10).

There is a strong relationship between alcohol use in teens and aggressive, delinquent, and even more serious criminal behaviors. In a recent survey, teens who used alcohol were more likely to report that they used illicit drugs than were teens who did not use alcohol. This finding was true for heavy, binge, or light drinkers. Alcohol use and other drug use have been implicated in the leading causes of death and injury among adolescents and young adults, including motor vehicle crashes, homicides, and suicides ([35; 52]). In addition, the risk for violent behavior increases when teenagers use alcohol and have access to guns [1]. Alcohol use and drug use are also strong predictors for violence against partners in dating relationships [40].

Many parents have difficulty knowing how to respond to alcohol abuse in their children. Responding may be difficult because the parents may drink alcohol themselves or they may have done so during their adolescent or young adult years. Consequently, parents may minimize the consequences of their teen's experimenting with some of the "gateway drugs." Gateway drugs include alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. Not all teens who experiment with the gateway drugs go on to "harder drugs" such as cocaine or crack. However, there is a direct relationship between early alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use and later use of harder drugs. Once a teen experiments with one drug, the step to another drug becomes easier [26]. New information also suggests that some children may be genetically predisposed to addiction and that even limited exposure to gateway drugs may put these children at significant risk of long-term addiction.

Teens who choose to abuse substances often have similar characteristics or risk factors. These teenagers typically have poor social skills, and they may be shy or aggressive. They may not be doing well in school and may be rebellious while pushing for more independence. They may also seek excitement and have poor impulse control. Family characteristics or risk factors include parents who abuse substances, have poor family management skills, and have high levels of family conflict or physical abuse. Environmental risk factors include living in a community that accepts substance abuse. Other risk factors include poverty, the influence of friends, and neighborhood disorganization, where making a connection with a family support organization is difficult [44].

The risk for violent behavior increases when youth use alcohol and have access to guns.

But it is not just teens from environments that accept or condone substance abuse who are at risk. It is not unusual for any teenager to try an illegal substance. Studies suggest that friends can have a tremendous impact on whether or not a youth will experiment with drugs. Recent surveys, for example, show that one of the most important factors that encourages teens not to use drugs is that the teenager's friends do not use drugs [44].

While many of these risk factors might have been handled more easily by intervening when the teen was younger, it is never too late to start helping a youth who is headed for trouble. For example, encouraging your teen to participate in positive school activities is helpful. A teenager may not respond to the parent's "nudging" as readily as a suggestion from a coach or favorite teacher at school. However, parents may find it helpful to talk with a school counselor or teacher and ask for his or her support to help engage the teenager in activities that will encourage healthy friendships and better school performance. If the family is experiencing communication problems, parents may find it helpful to call a "family meeting" to discuss these concerns and possible solutions. Parents may also want to seek outside help from a counselor, religious leader, or other professional. Regardless of what has happened in the teenager's past, a sincere effort to eliminate risky behaviors during the adolescent years can have a positive impact on the child's future and the family's ability to cope.

Many children credit their parents as a major influence in choosing not to smoke or use alcohol or drugs.

Parents who remember drug experimentation from their own teenage years might be interested in these facts about drug use today:

- Many of today's drugs are more potent and addictive than the drugs in common use 20 years ago. Some are now known to cause permanent brain damage or death—even from minimal use [4; 26; 28].
- New research suggests that the adolescent and young adult brain is more vulnerable to addiction than previously thought. Youth who begin drug experimentation in their teen years are much more likely to be addicted to substances in later years than people who experiment with drugs or alcohol starting in their middle to late 20s [4].
- Researchers have also found more links between substance abuse and memory loss, psychiatric conditions, and learning disabilities. Although the nature of these links is not yet fully understood, a youth with a disability or psychiatric condition may be at greater risk of abusing substances or becoming addicted [34; 44].

Many children credit their parents as a major influence in choosing not to smoke or use alcohol or drugs. Parents can encourage the growth of protective factors in their children by such simple acts as helping with homework and eating dinner with their children. Parents should also be clear about family values, setting an example of being honest, and engaging in healthy activities.

However, many parents may not be aware that their teenager is experimenting with drugs until they find drug paraphernalia left around the house or in the family car. In this situation, it is likely that the child has been "using" for some time and may already be addicted. The teen has probably reached the point when he or she is less able to hide the addictive behavior. In situations such as this, parents are encouraged to seek immediate help from a counselor specializing in substance abuse issues so that their child can be assessed and have access to treatment. Current medical practice and research support the view that addiction is a disease and that, like other diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, drug addiction requires prompt and appropriate medical attention [33; 34].

Who can parents talk to if they have concerns about their child's drug or alcohol abuse?

"*Even in the face of mounting evidence, parents often have a hard time acknowledging that their child has an alcohol, tobacco, or drug problem. Anger, resentment, guilt, and a sense of failure are all common reactions, but it is important to avoid self-blame. Drug abuse occurs in families of all economic and social backgrounds, in happy and unhappy homes alike. Most important is that the faster you act, the sooner your child can start to become well again*" [47].

School counselors, physicians, substance abuse counselors, parent support groups, community drug hotlines, city and local health departments, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or Al-Anon and Alateen are all good sources of information and assistance.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Urban School-Community Parent Programs to Prevent Drug Use
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed427093.html

Preventing Substance Abuse at Home and at School
http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnew497/pnew497d.html

Drug Use Rises for Teenagers
http://npin.org/pnews/1996/pnewn96/pnewn96f.html

How Can Schools Help Prevent Children from Using Drugs?
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00384/n00384.html

The Brown Adolescent Newsletter: Drug Abuse Prevention: Programs That Work
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew498/pnew498c.html

Drug Abuse Prevention: School-Based Strategies That Work
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed409316.html

Teenage Pregnancy and Drug Abuse: Sources of Problem Behaviors
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed316615.html

Youth and Alcohol: An Overview
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/substnce/docs/youthalc.htm

Substance Abuse
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/substnce/docs/tableoc.htm

Teens, Alcohol, and Other Drugs
http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/teendrug.htm

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
http://www.ncadd.org/index.html

Teens: Alcohol and Other Drugs
http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/teendrug.htm

A Guide for Parents, Grandparents, Elders, Mentors, and Other Caregivers: Keeping Youth Drug Free
http://www.health.org/reality/parentsguide/

Drugs and Alcohol: Children and Youth: Materials for Adults Working with Kids Ages 5-12
http://www.ncpc.org/10adu8.htm

Ups and Downs of Adolescence: Facts about Substance Abuse
http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/fcs/upsdowns/upsapr00.htm

Growing Up Drug Free
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/parents_guide/index.html

CASA's Parents' Guide to Raising Drug Free Kids
http://www.casacolumbia.org/newsletter1458/newsletter_show.htm?doc_id=5590

Adolescent Substance Abuse: Counseling Issues
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed260364.html

Access to Guns and Other Weapons

How does access to guns and other weapons fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

The availability and use of guns among American youth are causes for national concern. There has been a decline in the rate of violent crime with a weapon, including aggravated assault and murder. However, recent surveys reveal that when asked confidentially, high school students believe that the level of violence has remained constant since 1993 [9]. One survey of selected inner-city students showed that 25% reported carrying a weapon in school at some point. As many as 40% of the students carried a weapon outside of school ([48], pp. 10–11). Murder using guns is the second leading cause of death for all youth between 15 and 19 years of age ([8], p. 4). It is also the leading cause of death for African Americans [37].

Guns also play a role in suicides. Of the children ages 19 or younger who were killed in 1996, as many as 50% committed suicide. The rate of teen suicides involving a gun increased 39% between 1980 and 1994 ([37], p. 9). While black adolescent males have a high risk for gun-related homicides, white adolescent males have a high risk for gun-related suicides. When teens have easy access to firearms in the home, these risk factors go up [8].

Parents and families should be alert to signs that their teen may not feel safe at school and that the child is not coping well with those feelings. Boys in particular may not know how to tell their parents about their fears. They may think that talking about their feelings would decrease their "macho" image or increase their risk of harm from peers. Sometimes a parent's first clue that a teenage son is frightened is the discovery that he is carrying a concealed weapon such as a club, knife, or gun. Other early indicators of fear include frequent headaches or minor illnesses, frequent requests to stay home from school, or, in extreme cases, refusing to go to school. Parents may also want to pay special attention to teenagers who change their regular route of going to or from school in order to avoid confrontation.

One way to start a discussion on this sensitive topic is by sharing a newspaper article about school violence and asking the teenager if he or she has any friends who have experienced school violence. Another important strategy is to work closely with school staff to implement safe neighborhood and school strategies. When parents are a presence in school, it helps send the message that safety matters.

> *The proliferation of guns in many communities, combined with a popular culture that often glorifies violence and weapon use, makes many parents who have guns at home today feel the need to take additional safety measures to protect their children from gun violence.*

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) traces the most recent increase in juvenile violence to the early 1980s. The 1980s was a time when crack cocaine was introduced in many urban communities [38]. According to the OJJDP report, more juveniles involved in drug trafficking began to carry guns. Consequently, other inner-city gangs and juveniles who may not have been involved with the drug industry felt the need to obtain guns for their own protection [37]. Current information shows that the upward trend in juvenile crime peaked in 1993 and has been gradually declining or remaining steady over the past 7 years.

Easy access to firearms is not exclusive to any particular group of teenagers. A study of 569 teenagers in an urban, ethnically diverse, "safe" high school (with no prior incidents of gun violence) showed that 51% of the students reported easy access to guns. As many as 49% said they knew someone who had been killed by gunfire ([8], pp. 10–11). In the same study, teenagers who experimented with drugs or alcohol were found to be more likely to have access to guns. Many rural youth have traditionally had access to guns and knives but may be more likely to view them as tools to help with jobs involved in rural living.

Many adults in the United States grew up in households with guns and were taught about gun safety by their parents and the other adults in their families. However, now there is a proliferation of guns in many communities. When that is combined with a popular culture that often glorifies violence and weapon use, many parents who have guns at home today feel the need to take additional safety measures to protect their children from gun violence [20; 41]. If parents choose not to remove guns and other weapons from their home, they should make certain that guns are kept in locked cases and out of reach of children. If the family chooses to keep guns at home, and a teenager has access to them, it is critical that the young person be instructed in the responsible use of the weapon. It is also important that parents and other family members model the same responsible behavior related to the use of guns or other weapons. Parents may want to keep in mind that in some areas they may be held liable for their minor child's misuse of a gun or any other weapon.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's access to guns and other weapons?

School counselors and administrators, police, psychologists, mental health professionals, and representatives of community groups involved in violence prevention programs are good sources of information and support for parents who want their teen to make responsible choices about weapons.

Your Thoughts and Notes

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Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Schools Attack the Roots of Violence
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed335806.html

An Overview of Strategies to Reduce School Violence
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig115.html

Saying No to Guns—It's Not Enough: An Interview with Marjorie Hardy
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew700/int700b.html

Youth and Guns
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/gun.htm

Preventing Juvenile Gun Violence in Schools
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/gunfree.htm

Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence
http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/fs9993.pdf

Children and Firearms
http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/firearms.htm

Kids and Guns
http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/178994.pdf

Campus Security and Violence Education
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/campus.htm

Peer Influences

How do peer influences fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Vulnerability to peer pressure—being swayed by the demands and dares of friends—peaks during the early teen years [50]. Although the strong influence of friends during adolescence is a given, harmful influence from peers is not an inevitable outcome. Friends can encourage one another to do well in school, to stay away from drugs and alcohol, and to refrain from sex. Just as easily, friends can encourage one another to engage in risky, antisocial activities and to reject academic achievement [21; 32]. In fact, some research supports what conventional wisdom tells us about "bad company": Associating with deviant or antisocial peers encourages increased delinquency ([11], p. 833).

Gangs are the modern-day version of antisocial peer groups [11]. Not surprisingly, one of the early warning signs that a teen is having trouble is association with gangs or groups of friends who support antisocial values and behaviors. Gangs gain momentum by causing fear and stress among students and in the neighborhood. Only a small percentage of teens join gangs, and relatively few gang members participate in violence. Yet, in three-fourths of the murder and assault acts committed by youth, the perpetrators are likely to be gang members. Gang violence today is deadlier than in the past, when violent disputes were fought with fists, switchblades, or chains. Today, the weapons of choice are guns and automatic weapons. In some cases, drive-by shootings have replaced schoolyard fights, increasing the likelihood of hurting innocent bystanders [2].

While parents cannot pick their teenagers' friends, they can have a powerful indirect effect on the influence of their teen's friends in two primary ways. First, parents can monitor and exert some control over the friends their teenager spends time with. In fact, the influence of parental monitoring on teens' association with "the wrong crowd" has been discussed extensively in research. Parents who are unaware of where their child is, who their child is with, and what their child is doing leave their teenagers more susceptible to antisocial peer pressure [12].

However, parental monitoring is most successful when the teen experiences it as *caring*. In effective monitoring, parents take a genuine interest in their adolescent's activities within the context of a kind and warm relationship. As a result, teens are less likely to view their parents' interest as being intrusive. This is a vital distinction for teenagers who need increasing autonomy from their parents for healthy development [10].

> *Parental monitoring is most successful when the teen experiences it as caring—parents taking a genuine interest in their adolescent's activities within the context of a kind and warm relationship—rather than when it is intrusive.*

A second way that parents influence their adolescent's choice of friends is by providing guidance about where their teen will spend time. Parents can encourage teens to spend time in safe areas of the neighborhood, school, or religious community during the day, after school, and on the weekend [50]. Some parents may have few options to move from one neighborhood to another or to choose the school their child attends. However, parents working cooperatively can have a strong influence on creating a positive community and school culture.

Teenagers who have had an early pattern of aggressiveness or rejection by friends are more likely to join an antisocial peer group [11]. Some research suggests that learning difficulties, such as attention

82

deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) or conduct disorders (CD), increase a teenager's risk for later aggression and delinquency. The risk may increase because of the difficulty ADHD youth may have with controlling their impulsive behavior [11; 34]. However, aggressive and delinquent behaviors are not an inevitable outcome of these conditions. In fact, new research indicates that effective parenting at home and consistent attention to learning problems in school can reduce or even eliminate these risk factors [11].

Who can parents talk with when they are concerned about the influence of their child's peer group?

Other parents, school counselors, police, psychologists, and mental health professionals are good sources of information and assistance for parents concerned about these issues. Contacting local community groups such as recreation departments and faith-based organizations can help parents work within the community to develop activities that encourage healthy friendships and discourage gang activities.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Gangs in Schools
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig99.html

Understanding Violent Acts in Children: An Interview with Dr. Edward Taylor
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew998/featu998.html

Does Moving Have a Harmful Impact on Children?
http://npin.org/pnews/1996/pnew996/pnew996n.html

Are Our Boys All Right?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew300/int300a.html

How Parents and Peers Influence Children's School Success
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew900/int900e.html

Gangs: From Social Groups to Violent Delinquents
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/monographs/uds107/gang_gangs.html

Peers, Parents, and Schools: Two Views on How They Affect Student Achievement
http://www.edsource.org/pub_edfct_peers.html

Gangs: Parent Resource Guide
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/gangs/docs/parent1.htm

Early Warning, Timely Response
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html

If a Child Threatens to Run Away, Should Parents Be Concerned?
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew198/pnew198f.html

Gangs
http://www.ncjrs.org/jjfact.htm#gangs

Is Youth Violence Just Another Fact of Life?
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/apa.htm

Supporting Girls in Early Adolescence
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1995/drgirl95.html

Student Dress Codes
http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/digests/digest117.html

Living with Adolescents: An Interview with Reed Larson
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew100/int100a.html

What to Expect from Your Teenagers
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew398/pnew398i.html

If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School, What Can Parents and Teachers Do?
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/rober97b.html

Gang Activity at School: Prevention Strategies
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/monographs/uds107/gang_contents.html

Dating Relationships

How do dating relationships and violence fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

In our society, most teens, and even some preteens, begin exploring relationships with members of the opposite sex. This early "going-together" behavior, such as sitting together in the lunchroom or talking on the phone, is usually harmless and may in fact be helpful in developing healthy friendships in later life. However, sometimes teenagers are pressured by friends, the media, or family members to act out in inappropriate ways and develop intimate relationships before they are developmentally ready. Relationships that start out as innocent friendships can become destructive. Dating violence is "a pattern of repeated actual or threatened acts that physically, sexually or verbally abuses a member or a couple who are dating" ([39], p. 5). One form of dating violence is date rape, a sexually aggressive act that includes attempted or forced intercourse between a dating couple. Date rape is believed to account for 60% of all reported rapes ([39], p. 5).

> *Dating violence is 'a pattern of repeated actual or threatened acts that physically, sexually or verbally abuses a member of a couple who are dating.'*

Conservative estimates tell us that physical aggression occurs in at least one in five of all dating relationships ([49], p. 467). In one recent study on the rates of dating violence for high school boys and girls, researchers discovered that 36.4% of girls and 37.1% of boys reported some physical violence in their recent dating relationships. Over 40% of both males and females said that the dating abuse occurred in a school building or on school grounds. Furthermore, girls reported that 40% of the time when they experienced the abuse someone else was present. However, fewer than 3% of males and females in the study reported the abusive incident to someone in authority (e.g., police, counselor, or teacher). Six percent said they told a family member, 61% told a friend, and over 30% told no one about the incident of dating violence. These data support the finding that dating violence is significantly underreported ([30], pp. 1–4; [36]).

An often-overlooked aspect of dating or relationship violence is in same-sex relationships. New findings suggest that violence in same-sex relationships is as prevalent (25–33%) as in heterosexual relationships ([6], p. 5). However, people who are in same-sex relationships are less likely to report abuse and may not be taken seriously if they seek help. Victims of same-sex relationship violence are also less able to get legal protection from their abusers because in some states, restraining laws do not cover same-sex violence ([6], p. 9).

Research on dating violence indicates that patterns of abusive behavior may begin early in a person's life. Patterns of violence in a dating relationship may lead to patterns of violence between marital partners later on. Children who witness family violence and are exposed to corporal punishment are more likely to use violence with peers and with romantic partners later in life, continuing the cycle of abuse [30; 49]. Other factors that have been shown to predict dating violence and that are likely learned within the family include:

- acceptance of partner violence as an appropriate response to conflict [40; 49];
- high levels of conflict in the dating relationship [40];
- alcohol and drug use that are believed to lower one's prohibitions against the use of violence [40; 49].

Both teen boys and girls are at risk of developing relationship patterns that can be potentially destructive. Family experiences and peer and media influences have a strong influence on how young people handle their dating relationships. Our society frequently sends conflicting messages about what attributes are important in young men and women. For example, teenage boys are encouraged to be courageous and strong but may overstep appropriate expectations. Teen boys may be at significant risk of developing behaviors of dominance and aggression toward girls while restraining their emotions and behaviors related to empathy and compassion. For many young men, finding appropriate patterns of behavior in their relationships with young women becomes a difficult and confusing balancing act [25].

> *Parents' major contribution is to set the example of a healthy relationship by modeling respectful behavior with each other, or, in the case of single parents, in their own relationships.*

A large percentage of dating violence occurs on school grounds or college campuses. In response, many schools have started programs intended to prevent dating violence within the larger context of school violence prevention [29; 30]. Over the past few decades, we have increased our support and understanding for the issues that may negatively impact young women in their relationships. However, the support groups or mentoring for young men facing relationship difficulties is comparatively limited.

Parents play an important role in helping their children understand dating relationships. One way parents can support healthy dating relationships is by encouraging teenagers to go out with their friends in groups of boys and girls. Having fun in groups helps teens to delay "couples" dating, at least until the teen is 16 years old. Many teenagers who realize that they don't have to have a boyfriend or girlfriend and that their parents think it is healthy just to have good friendships are actually relieved. It frees them from the stress of trying to imitate the dating relationships they have seen on TV or witnessed among older teens. Parents' major contribution is to set the example of a healthy relationship by modeling respectful behavior with each other, or, in the case of single parents, in their own relationships [49].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about dating relationships and violence in their child's life?

Other parents, teachers, school counselors, and community professionals who organize activities for teenagers are good resources for information and assistance. If you are concerned that your teenager may be involved in a violent relationship, you may wish to talk with psychologists and other mental health professionals, staff at local shelters for battered women, or rape crisis centers.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Dating Violence: Why Does It Occur and How Does It Fit in the Cycle of Violence?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew700/int700c.html

Teaching Guide: Dating Violence
http://www.nnfr.org/adolsex/inform/adolsex_violtg.html

Fact Sheet on Dating Violence
http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/yvpt/datviol.htm

Love Doesn't Have to Hurt
http://www.apa.org/pi/pii/teen/homepage.html

Sexual Assault Information Page
http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/saInfoPage.html

Trust Betrayed
http://www.wvdhhr.org/bph/trust/

When Love Hurts: A Guide for Girls on Love, Respect, and Abuse in Relationships
http://home.vicnet.net.au/~girlsown/

Successful Transitions from Adolescence to Young Adulthood

How do successful transitions fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

For most teenagers in our society, the transition from secondary school to work or college actually begins around their sophomore or junior year in high school. The years from 15 through 19 are important as teens begin to anticipate when they will be graduating from high school and what they will be doing after graduation. Many teenagers in our society hope to attend college, while others plan on post-high school job training. Still others plan to join the workforce immediately upon graduation. If a family has moved frequently, it may be difficult for a teenager to get to know adults outside of school who can advise them about careers. Working closely with the school to find career-related internships becomes even more important.

Most teens need opportunities at school and outside of school to learn how to prepare, assess, plan, and carry out meaningful tasks.

Easy access to career and employment counseling is essential at the high school level. Juniors and seniors who have investigated their college or work options through visits to colleges or participated in summer or after-school internships are likely to be better prepared for taking the next step beyond the structured high school experience. In a constantly changing work environment where there is a growing demand for more education and more technology, choices can be confusing. Parents and teens may find these years stressful [45].

Parents can help by talking about career options with their teen. Parents can work with their teen and the school staff to make sure that students receive support, information, and counseling. Students need to be clearly informed about what courses and credits are needed for graduation, for work preparation, or for further education. An uncertain future beyond secondary school and inadequate mentoring can put an adolescent transitioning out of secondary school at risk for a variety of difficulties [46].

Many teens have part-time jobs during their school years. Some research suggests this experience can be productive or harmful, depending on the number of hours worked per week and the type of employment. Teens who work fewer than 20 hours a week during the academic year at jobs where they feel they are learning new skills report that their grades improve. They also become more punctual and dependable. Girls report increased self-reliance, and boys report enhanced self-image when they are mastering new skills that are likely to help them in the future [31]. However, teens may have difficulty if they try to balance school work, family life, and social life with a part-time, unrewarding job that exceeds 20 hours weekly. Some research suggests that teens working more than 20 hours per week may become less interested in school and be at increased risk for engaging in delinquent behavior, earning poor grades, and having poor self-esteem and substance abuse problems [51].

The transition from secondary school to young adulthood is critical. Research shows that there is an increased risk for violence in teens' lives when that transition is not successful. Data from the National Youth Survey show that violent offenses for both young men and women tend to peak at around age 17 and continue at high, but declining, rates until age 25 ([11], p. 792). The evidence suggests that young people who can establish a healthy structure for their lives, including a stable work and family life, tend to stay out of trouble or end previous involvement in delinquent activity [11].

Through his research with teenagers, Professor Reed Larson has found that many teens, including high school honor students, are "not invested in paths into the future that excite them or feel like they originate from within. A central question of youth development is how to get adolescents' fires lit, how to have them develop the complex skills needed to take charge of their lives" ([27], p. 170). Larson particularly focuses on the development of initiative in young people, defined as enthusiastically directing one's attention or energies toward a challenging goal. Initiative is a core requirement for many aspects of positive youth development, including creativity, leadership, altruism, and community participation.

Turning 18 does not necessarily make a young person capable of handling all aspects of adult life.

Children and teenagers are rarely given meaningful responsibilities in our society. However, when they turn 18, many teens are suddenly required to take charge of their lives to a much greater degree than in many other societies. Most teens need opportunities at school and outside of school to learn how to prepare, assess, plan, and carry out meaningful tasks. Teens also benefit from having access to successful adult role models in a variety of adult careers. Many experts suggest that educators and parents need to provide expertly staffed activities throughout the school year. Providing a variety of meaningful activities allows teens to choose among opportunities linked to businesses, professional arts, and civic organizations interested in connecting youth to adult society [27].

The fact that busy parents juggling work and family life may have less time to spend with their children and fewer easy opportunities to communicate with them complicates a teen's transition to adulthood. But research suggests that teens value their parents' views and appreciate the security that the family offers, particularly when the teenager is having difficulty making decisions [46]. In light of some of the compelling research on risk factors with young adults, a new study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development plans to focus on young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. The study will investigate some of the risk factors that are affecting our teenagers and young adults, as well as some of the protective factors that parents, schools, and communities can strengthen to encourage young adults to achieve independence successfully [3].

Parents can have an important impact on their teenager's transition out of high school by encouraging their son or daughter to meet with career counselors to discuss options, to volunteer at a local hospital or recreation center, or to serve as an intern at a local business. Parents may encourage the youth to begin part-time work in a field in which he has an interest and investigate programs at colleges he may want to attend.

Turning 18 does not necessarily make a young person capable of handling all aspects of adult life. The transition to independence is a *process* during which teenagers continue to benefit from the regular communication, guidance, and support of parents or other caring adults.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's successful transitions from high school?

Other parents, teachers, school and college counselors (including community college counselors), professionals in specific areas of interest to your teenager, and local community volunteer services are good resources for information and assistance.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Models of Adolescent Transition
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00008/n00008.html

Parents and the School-to-Work Transition of Special Needs Youth
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00159/n00159.html

Making the MOST of Out-of-School Time: Technology's Role in Collaboration
http://npin.org/library/1999/n00095/n00095.html

Preparing Middle School Students for a Career
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00061/n00061.html

How to Prepare Your Children for Work
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00071/n00071.html

A Better Map
http://npin.org/library/1999/n00089/inside.html#map

Trends and Issues: Youth Apprenticeship
http://eserver.org/literacy/youth-apprenticeship.txt

The Peer Effect on Academic Achievement
http://www.heritage.org/library/cda/cda00-06.html

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About IVPA, NPIN, and the ERIC System & ERIC/EECE

The Illinois Violence Prevention Authority (IVPA)

Established by the Illinois Violence Prevention Act of 1995, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority (IVPA) is the first state agency of its kind dedicated to violence prevention in the United States. In creating the IVPA, the Illinois State Legislature recognized the need for a comprehensive, collaborative public health and public safety approach to violence prevention.

The IVPA is co-chaired by the Illinois Attorney General, Jim Ryan, and the Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, Dr. John Lumpkin. The Authority's board includes state agency directors and appointed private sector officials working in the area of violence prevention.

Primary Goals

In keeping with its mandate, the IVPA has defined five main goals:

- Develop and implement a statewide plan for violence prevention
- Fund local and statewide anti-violence programs
- Coordinate existing violence prevention initiatives and encourage collaborative projects
- Evaluate and provide technical assistance for violence prevention programming
- Conduct public education and awareness efforts about violence and its prevention

Background on Primary Goals

Planning

The IVPA's planning document, "Building a Safe Illinois: A Violence Prevention Plan for Illinois," outlines the scope of interpersonal violence in Illinois and presents the risk factors and best practices associated with violence prevention. Based on this information and a survey of the violence prevention field, the IVPA has developed a 3-year anti-violence program that includes funding priorities and implementation strategies.

Funding

The Authority distributes grants statewide through a program that recognizes effective violence prevention efforts. In cooperation with the Illinois Secretary of State's Office, the IVPA generates monies to support funding activities through the sale of specially designed "Prevent Violence" (PV) license plates. Approximately 50,000 PV plates have been sold since January 1996, generating over $2 million in revenue as of September 1998. The Authority began distributing these funds to innovative violence prevention programs in July 1997.

Initially, the Authority established three funding priorities: family violence prevention, youth violence prevention, and community safety. In the 1998 spring legislative session, an additional $1 million was allocated to the Authority. These funds will be used to support additional programming, including, for the first time, grants for community policing programs and grants to support research projects.

IVPA members review and score proposals for funding and make recommendations to the Authority Board. The Authority provides funding for programs that address the following areas:

- Community-based youth violence prevention programs (mentoring programs, after-school programs, job programs, etc.)
- Implementation and evaluation of comprehensive Pre-K–12 school-based violence prevention programs
- Early childhood intervention programs (0–5) designed to prevent violence and identify and serve children and families at risk
- Family violence and sexual assault prevention initiatives
- Programs that integrate violence prevention initiatives with health care provision or alcohol and substance abuse prevention efforts
- Innovative community policing or law enforcement approaches to violence prevention
- Technical assistance and training to help build the capacity of communities, organizations, and systems to develop, implement, and evaluate violence prevention programs

More than 60 agencies have received funding from the IVPA in its first two years of grantmaking.

Coordinating

The IVPA plays a leadership role in linking together violence prevention efforts throughout the state. The IVPA accomplishes this through coordinating the violence prevention efforts of the state and local agencies represented on the Authority Board, emphasizing multidisciplinary, collaborative prevention efforts. The IVPA also actively works with other agencies and organizations in the private sector, encouraging networking and exchange of best practice models.

As a result, diverse violence prevention initiatives benefit from the increased efficiencies resulting from partnerships. The Authority is a participant and funder of five major collaborative projects.

Evaluating and Technical Assistance

Ongoing evaluation allows the IVPA to maintain a cohesive violence prevention strategy as new programs come into being and existing programs evolve.

Projects funded by the IVPA are responsible for meeting the Authority's evaluation criteria and are given the assistance and support of the IVPA in achieving their goals. In addition, the Authority provides technical assistance to help communities and organizations develop and successfully implement their anti-violence programs. During FY 99, the IVPA funded several research projects that evaluated the effectiveness of different approaches to violence prevention.

Educating

The IVPA conducts public education and awareness campaigns to promote citizen action and involvement in violence prevention. Through the use of public service announcements, a videotape, and print material, the IVPA emphasizes the theme that violence prevention works. Young children are reached through an expanding outreach program that includes a "peace pledge," a customized song, a mascot, and a newsletter. The IVPA also encourages the public to purchase prevent violence license plates through the message: "Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Do Something."

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN)

The ERIC Clearinghouses on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) and on Urban Education (ERIC/CUE) invite you to join them on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN), an Internet-based information network and service for parents, organizations, and individuals who support parents in raising and educating their children.

What Is NPIN?

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) finds and shares high-quality materials related to parenting and parent involvement in education. The focus is on creating an attractive, widely available resource collection that incorporates graphics and other parent-friendly features of the Internet. NPIN:

- provides an attractive, single point of access on the World Wide Web to high-quality information on parenting and parent involvement in their children's education;
- continually adds new information to its already broad collection for parents and those who work with parents; and
- trains parents and parenting professionals in the skills needed to use NPIN and other World Wide Web resources.

For parents... NPIN offers easy access to high-quality information on raising healthy children and on becoming informed partners in their children's education.

For organizations... NPIN provides research-based information that can be incorporated with local resources on parenting and on how parents can be actively involved in their children's learning—at home, at school, and in their communities.

What Does NPIN Do?

Since 1993, NPIN has been developing one of the largest collections of high-quality, noncommercial information on the Internet on parenting, child development, and family life. The U.S. Department of Education, through the National Library of Education, supports the National Parent Information Network through the ERIC program.

NPIN includes the following services:

PARENT NEWS — An award-winning Internet source of news for parents on child rearing and education, *Parent News* is updated every 2 months and includes feature articles; listings and descriptions of parenting-related organizations, newsletters, books, and Internet sites; and community parent-support programming ideas.

PARENTS AskERIC — An electronic mail question-and-answer service for parents and those who work with parents on issues related to child development, care, and education.

PARENTING-L — An informal Internet discussion list for parents and parenting professionals that focuses on current parenting concerns.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND PARENTING PROFESSIONALS — A large and growing collection of articles, essays, and other materials on family life, child development, and parenting from birth through early adolescence.

NPIN ILLINOIS — An information service and World Wide Web site that connects parents and families to services and resources around the state. Visit the information link for Illinois families at: http://npinil.crc.uiuc.edu

How Can You Participate?

- Visit NPIN's Web site at: http://npin.org
- Use PARENTS AskERIC by emailing parenting questions to: askeric@askeric.org
- Work with NPIN to share your high-quality parenting materials. The list of organizations contributing information to NPIN continues to expand. It includes the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; the National Association for the Education of Young Children; the National Urban League; National Fathers' Network; and many other organizations.
- Provide feedback, and suggest new materials to be acquired and topics or issues that you or the families you work with would like to see included on the National Parent Information Network.
- Contact NPIN to discuss a training workshop for your local family center, library, Head Start program, school, or parenting organization.

For more information, contact:

National Parent Information Network
ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386
World Wide Web: http://npin.org
Electronic Mail: npin@uiuc.edu
Toll-Free Number: 800-583-4135

The ERIC System and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system designed to provide users with ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. Established in 1966, ERIC is a program of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and is administered by the National Library of Education.

The ERIC database, the world's largest source of education information, contains nearly a million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. You can access the ERIC database online via the Internet, on CD-ROM, or through the printed abstract journals *Resources in Education* and *Current Index to Journals in Education*. The database is updated monthly (quarterly on CD-ROM), ensuring that the information you receive is timely and accurate.

The ERIC system, through its 16 subject-specific clearinghouses, associated adjunct clearinghouses, and support components, provides a variety of services and products that can help you stay up to date on a broad range of education-related issues. Products include research summaries, bibliographies, reference and referral services, computer searches, and document reproduction.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE), one of the 16 ERIC clearinghouses, specializes in the education, care, and parenting of children from birth through early adolescence, and operates the National Parent Information Network (NPIN). All the ERIC clearinghouses acquire significant literature within their particular scope; select the highest quality and most relevant materials; and catalog, index, and abstract them for input into the ERIC database. The clearinghouses also provide research summaries, bibliographies, information analysis papers, and many other products and services. Together, the clearinghouses present the most comprehensive mosaic of education information in the country.

For more information on the ERIC system and ERIC/EECE, please visit our World Wide Web site at http://ericeece.org or call us at 800-583-4135.

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Educational Resources Information Center

100

Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents **Summary**

An Overview of Violence Prevention

Violence prevention consists of stopping a person from inflicting emotional or physical harm on another *before* it happens. TV often reports on violence by children and adults. In fact, some surveys show that Americans rate crime as one of the most important problems facing our country. At the same time, research shows that there has been a decrease in violence over the last 5 years.

There is no single reason why children commit violent acts or become victims of violence. The causes and effects of violence are complicated. But you can help your child avoid violence by understanding some of the factors that help prevent it.

- *Understand your child's temperament.* Children who are easily irritated or impulsive, or who have a short attention span, are more likely than other children to hit or yell. Parents may need to spend time helping impulsive children learn to be patient and talk through their problems.
- *Understand your child's developmental stages.* It helps to have realistic expectations for your children's behavior. Knowing what to expect during the early, middle, and teen years helps parents help their children build a foundation of nonviolent coping skills for successful adulthood.
- *Understand the impact of domestic violence.* Children who see violence in their own families are in danger of being abused or becoming abusers, doing poorly in school, having low self-esteem, and breaking the law. Reducing or eliminating the violence at home can make a big difference.
- *Understand that there are different ways to parent.* Parents who share their cultural background and family expectations by responding to their children, supporting their efforts in and out of school, and engaging in nonviolent discipline are more likely than other parents to have children who have friends and do well in school.
- *Understand that a strong family is important.* Children who live in families that appreciate each family member, spend time together, communicate with each other, are committed to each other, have the ability to resolve problems positively, and have a commitment to a faith community are often more resilient and less prone to violence than other children. Parents can work on strengthening their own families.
- *Understand that a strong community is important.* Children raised in communities where they have access to health care, adequate housing, a good education, enriching after-school activities, caring adults, and employment opportunities tend to transition more successfully into adulthood than other children. Parents can help by working to assure these things within their communities.

These summaries and the more comprehensive *Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* are intended to help you feel prepared for the parenting journey as it relates to violence and your children. You are not alone on this journey.

The information contained in this summary is taken from the Introduction of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents *by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).*

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Early Years: Developmental Overview

For babies and toddlers, parents are the center of the world. The trust that children build with their parents encourages them to learn many new skills. Self-esteem grows when children experience challenges and frustration on the way to success. Young children learn ways to cope with conflict and frustration from their families. Of course, they also learn to assert their will and test the rules.

When you encourage, respect, and support your young child's explorations while setting reasonable limits, you help build your child's capacity for self-confidence and self-control. As parents, you exert an especially strong influence over healthy development in the following areas:

- *Brain development and infant attachment.* Providing appropriate foods so that your child will grow and flourish is an important part of parenting. Loving and caring for your child so that he or she learns to love and care for other family members contributes to your child's brain development and to healthy relationships with others later in life.
- *Impulse control.* Parents help children learn impulse control at home. Teaching your child to wait patiently and to control anger, screaming, or biting is part of teaching impulse control.
- *Prosocial skills.* Children begin to understand how to behave toward friends when they see their parents model kind, respectful, and helpful relationships with others. Helping your child develop friendships with other young children is particularly important in the early years.
- *Violence on television and other media.* TV, computer games, popular music, and videos may suggest to young children that violence is OK. Limiting the amount of time your children spend in media-related activities can help prevent aggressive play and behaviors.
- *Toys that promote violent play.* Some toys encourage children to imitate the violent behavior they see on TV. Too much aggressive play is confusing for young children. Providing a variety of non-threatening toys will encourage your child's cooperative play and help enhance his or her creativity.
- *Early child care experiences.* Choosing *qualified* early child care providers who teach respectful behavior and use nonviolent discipline can help young children develop prosocial skills.
- *Managing family conflict.* When parents set an example by resolving disagreements without aggressive or disrespectful behavior, children begin to learn how to resolve conflicts peaceably with their own friends.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Early Years: Brain Development and Infant Attachment

The quality of a baby's early care has a lasting impact on the child's brain development. At birth, a newborn baby has an estimated 100 billion nerve cells called *neurons*. Each neuron forms many *synapses*, or connections made between the brain cells. Frequently used synapses become permanent, while those less frequently used may be lost. Scientists now believe that there are "windows of time" when particular parts of the baby's brain are growing rapidly. If the baby is not getting enough of the right foods or appropriate stimulation during those times, the baby's brain growth might be affected.

Infant attachment is a term used to describe the ability of a baby to seek comfort from a parent or caregiver. This is the person that the baby will turn to when she is hungry, afraid, tired, ill, or simply in need of attention. Healthy attachments for most babies will occur with their parents, brothers or sisters, and a familiar caregiver. These attachments encourage both the baby's brain development and the baby's ability to grow and form good friendships later in life. You can encourage your child's brain development and emotional attachment in a variety of ways, including:

- *Getting good prenatal care.* Pregnant women who do not abuse drugs or alcohol but eat properly, take prenatal vitamins, get plenty of rest, and have regular check-ups throughout their pregnancy tend to give birth to healthy babies.

- *Responding to your baby.* When you hold and carry your baby—when you talk to him, sing to him, cuddle him, and take time to learn the unique ways he is trying to communicate—you are helping your baby grow into a loving, caring child.

- *Providing good nutrition.* Some parents breastfeed and some parents bottle-feed, but all babies need appropriate amounts of food to enhance their brain's growth and healthy development. When you work with your baby's doctor and get regular check-ups on your baby's growth, you are helping your child to get a good start in life.

- *Offering stimulating activities.* Babies need a balance of sleep and stimulating activities to enhance their development. When your baby is awake, you can help her brain grow by playing with her, reading to her, taking her for walks, and talking to her about what she sees.

If you have concerns about your child's brain development and emotional attachment, you can contact a preschool teacher, pediatrician or other health care professional, parenting educator, early intervention specialist, or family counselor.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Early Years: Impulse Control

Impulse control, sometimes called self-regulation, refers to a child's ability to control his or her behavior. It is natural for young children to show a mix of strong emotions: excitement, joy, anger, frustration, and disappointment. An important part of growing up is learning to show these emotions at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Children who learn to control their anger and frustration and to use words to express their feelings get along better with others than children who do not learn these skills. Children who learn to control their impulses also have fewer behavior problems during their school years.

You can help your children learn impulse control by:

- *Making it clear that hurting others is not allowed.* When a child gets mad playing a game and pushes or hits another child, parents should first make sure that the other child is safe, and then let both children know that hurting others is not permitted. If necessary, parents can remove the aggressive child from the situation. Parents can set a good example by not overreacting to the child who has been hitting.

- *Providing words that children can use to express their feelings.* For example, when a child gets mad while playing a game, parents can encourage the child to use words that express strong feelings, such as "That really makes me mad!" or "I don't like it when you play the game that way!"

- *Helping children think of new methods for resolving problems.* Parents may want to suggest and supervise options, such as helping children to take turns or to share a toy.

- *Encouraging children to consider the needs of others.* When parents point out how pushing or hitting hurts others, they teach valuable lessons about consideration and empathy. These early lessons will help a child develop friendships and avoid violent encounters with others later in life.

If you have concerns about your child's development of impulse control, you can talk to child care teachers and providers, pediatricians, nurses, school teachers, or other school staff. They may be able to advise you whether your child's impulse control problem requires professional attention.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents **Summary**

The Early Years: Prosocial Skills

"Prosocial skills" is a broad term used to identify the behaviors people use to help them get along with others. Those behaviors include giving help and comfort to others, particularly friends. Prosocial skills help a child to show empathy and get along with others in positive ways. Expressing empathy, which might best be described as *being sensitive to the feelings of others*, is an important prosocial skill.

Prosocial skills, especially empathy, are important in making and keeping friends. You are helping your children to develop empathy and to respond positively to others when you show affection, sympathy, kindness, and regard for the feelings of others. Children learn more about empathy when you talk with them about the importance of being kind and considerate toward others. They also learn about empathy when you read stories to them that talk about these skills.

Friendships are an essential part of healthy child development. Children without friends may experience serious social problems throughout their lives. Many children who are rejected by their friends lack the social skills necessary to make and keep friends. They are at risk of becoming victims, bullies, or perpetrators of violence. Parents act as "social skills teachers" when they:

- Invite friends over and arrange for children to join in group play with other children.
- Talk to their child about what it means to be a host and how to look out for another child's needs.
- Discuss fairness with their child—how to take turns, how to share, and how to resolve problems.
- Respond to aggressive behaviors in their child and offer alternative, nonaggressive ways to solve problems.
- Help their child learn to play a variety of cooperative games that, in turn, the child can play with other children.

If you have concerns about your child's lack of prosocial skills, you can talk to other experienced parents, child care teachers and providers, parenting educators, pediatricians, school teachers, or counselors. They can suggest how to find out if your child's problems with prosocial skills require professional attention.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Early Years: Violence on Television and in Other Media

Many research studies have looked at how violent television shows affect children. Some of the effects are immediate. Some effects show up in children's behavior years later. There are three main ways that watching television violence affects children:

- *Television violence encourages aggressive actions and attitudes.*
  Children who watch a lot of television typically see programs with a lot of violent acts. Many of these acts go unpunished. The message children learn from watching these shows is that violence and aggression are acceptable ways to solve conflicts. Children who watch a lot of television are more likely to use physical and verbal aggression when they interact with others.

- *Television violence instills fearful and pessimistic attitudes in children about their world.*
  Children who watch a lot of television believe that their world is meaner and less safe than children who watch less television. Children who are heavy television viewers also often have more worries and fears than children who watch less television.

- *Television violence makes children less sensitive to real-life and make-believe violence.*
  Children who watch a lot of television gradually become less upset by the violence they see around them than children who are less frequent TV viewers. They become more tolerant of violence. In some cases, children who watch a lot of television become less sensitive to others' pain and suffering.

Studies have also shown that children who play a lot of violent video games often behave more aggressively and show less concern for others' pain than children who play video games less frequently.

As parents, you can help your child use media responsibly by setting certain limits on TV programs, movies, and video games while explaining why your family has these rules. For example, you can turn off TV programs, video games, or music with graphic or violent content and suggest instead board games, books, dress-up, or playing outside. Parents can also limit the total amount of a child's "media-time"—including TV, movies, and video games—to only a few hours each week. Watching TV with your child and discussing how real life is different from TV also helps.

If you have concerns about the effects of media violence on your child, you can talk to child care teachers and providers, school teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, and family counselors.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Early Years:
Toys That Promote Violent Behavior

Children have always been attracted to war play and war toys. But in the past 20 years, there has been a significant increase in the sale of war toys and action figures with weapons. The popularity of war toys is largely due to the increase in the number of television shows featuring war-related cartoons. Children are encouraged to buy and play with these highly realistic war toys by TV shows, movies, video games, and by promotional toys from stores and restaurants. Rather than creating their own games in which the war toy gradually becomes unimportant, some children use these toys to imitate the violent cartoons on TV.

Parents and teachers report the following negative effects on children's behavior as a result of increased use of war toys:

- Children become obsessed with war play and with the realistic-looking products that can be purchased and that are related to the programs they see on television.
- Children behave more aggressively with others when they imitate what they see on war-related cartoons.
- Children's play becomes less creative and less imaginative as they imitate what they see on TV or in the movies.

Parents play an important role in teaching their children to resist pressure from their friends and the media—including TV advertisers, cartoons, and children's programs—to buy certain toys. As a parent, you can explain that it is an advertiser's job to try to get people to buy their products, but it is the family's job to decide whether to spend money on that item. Viewing and discussing commercials and ads together helps both children and parents become more careful consumers.

If children still want to buy and play with war toys, parents can encourage appropriate adventure play by providing items such as inexpensive "dress-up" clothes resembling fire fighters, police officers, and historical figures—heroes and heroines—that reflect the family's cultural heritage. Your local children's librarian might suggest related children's books or videos that are entertaining, educational, and would engage your child's imagination.

If you have concerns about your child's use of war toys, you can talk to child care teachers and providers, school teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents **Summary**

The Early Years: Early Child Care Experiences

Early child care experiences affect children's development in two primary ways. First, high-quality child care helps provide important social skills necessary for healthy relationships with others. Second, high-quality child care contributes to children's early language development and ability to learn, which, in turn, helps children do better in school later on.

Many factors determine if your child will do well in child care. These factors include:

- *The quality of care.* Poor-quality child care may be harmful to children. High-quality child care centers tend to have a high ratio of teachers to children, a small group of children, and a high level of staff education or training.
- *The mother or family's feelings about working outside the home.* If the mother doesn't believe she should be working, or the father is opposed to the mother's employment, the resulting family stress may affect the child. On the other hand, if the parents are happy about working, the family may view their child's time in day care as a positive part of a normal day.
- *The conditions of the mother's or father's job.* Tension with co-workers and supervisors, and other severe job stresses, can be carried home and affect your child's adjustment to child care. If parents enjoy their jobs and their employers have family-friendly policies, the child is less likely to experience problems.
- *The presence of stressful family events.* Tensions at home, such as marital problems, can interact with job-related problems and affect the child and her behavior in child care. However, if families have support from their child care providers and employers through difficult times, their children are likely to do well in child care.

When you are concerned about the quality of your child's early care experiences, you can talk to your community's child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R). CCR&Rs assist parents in finding and choosing high-quality child care providers. In cases where parents have serious concerns about the level of care being provided, CCR&Rs can help parents identify the appropriate agency for registering complaints.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Early Years: Managing Family Conflict

Children learn important early lessons from their families about how to get along with others, how to handle conflict, and how to manage their anger. When children see their parents and family members deal with disagreements in *constructive* ways—sharing and discussing their viewpoints and resolving their problems—they are more likely to handle disagreements with friends constructively. When children see their parents and family members deal with disagreements *destructively*—using verbal or physical aggression, showing disrespect, or withdrawing from one another—they are more likely to handle disagreements with friends in destructive ways. By setting a good example, you help your child learn to handle anger and other strong emotions. Here are some ideas that have helped other parents handle anger and stress at home:

- *Creating a safe environment.* Young children are less likely to feel frustrated or angry when they have a dependable routine and feel safe. Parents can encourage regular mealtimes, playtimes, family activities, and sleep times that are supervised by caring adults who do not allow "hitting or hurting." When parents know about potential changes in the routine, they can inform and reassure the child, in advance, so he or she will continue to feel secure.

- *Switching the activity.* A child who has been involved in a quiet activity for a long time may need to burn off some energy by taking a walk outside. On the other hand, a child who has been playing actively for a long time may be tired or "wound up" and would benefit from a snack or quiet time. Sometimes minor changes in activities can help children feel better and relieve stress.

- *Using words.* Young children often do not know how to identify their strong feelings. When parents see that their child is having difficulty finding a way to express feelings, the parent can help the child find a way to say how he feels: *You look sad right now. Maybe it is because your cousin couldn't play today?*

Brothers and sisters also informally teach each other about how to handle conflict and how to compromise and cooperate. Children who have older brothers and sisters who are helpful and cooperative with younger children generally mimic their older siblings and are also helpful. Likewise, children with older siblings who are more destructive and aggressive with younger children may behave in more aggressive, destructive ways with their friends.

Studies have shown that parents can change destructive patterns of handling conflict. When parents handle disagreements openly and calmly and show respect for one another, children are more likely to behave in the same way with their friends.

If you have concerns about how your family manages conflict, you can talk to family counselors, parent educators, pediatricians, and other health care professionals.

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A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Middle Years: Developmental Overview

During the years from 6–12, children grow rapidly and experience huge social and intellectual changes. Children in this age group develop their ability to be logical thinkers and problem solvers. They experiment with what they have learned from home as they go into the outside world. They begin to compare their abilities and skills with those of their friends and classmates. Their self-esteem is tested daily as they explore new friendships and find out where they fit in.

The family remains the child's foundation during the middle years, but many children begin to question rules. How your family talks together and how you discipline your children become very important. When parents explain and set rules in a fair, consistent way, they are helping their child learn to act responsibly. This parenting approach also encourages children to use reason and negotiation to resolve differences. Parents exert a strong influence over their older child's healthy development in the following areas:

- *Friendships and peer relationships*. Helping your children develop healthy friendships is an important part of parenting. Parents can help by organizing informal activities with neighborhood children, or by supporting their child's participation in structured groups such as scouting, sports, or religious organizations.
- *Popular entertainment media*. The wide range of media, including TV, videos, music, video games, and computers, can have a significant impact on your child's healthy development. Parents can limit and monitor their child's overall "viewing time," making sure that the programs their children are watching are educational or entertaining and do not glorify aggression, violence, or other unhealthy behaviors.
- *After-school care and monitoring*. The time between school dismissal and dinner time is, for many children, an unsupervised time, when some children may be tempted to get involved in smoking, drinking, or shoplifting. Instead of unsupervised time, parents can monitor their child's activities at home, or support their participation in programs offered at the school or through the community.
- *Encouraging school success*. School success has been related to many aspects of a child's future development, including future academic success, healthy friendships, and decreased chances of getting involved in risky behaviors. When parents become partners with teachers by helping with homework, attending parent meetings, and alerting the teacher to academic problems, the child is more likely to have long-term school success.
- *Conflict management skills*. Most children need help learning how to handle anger, solve problems, and resolve conflicts without aggression. Parents and families are their children's first and best teachers when they set an example of handling disagreements using words, negotiation, and compromise.
- *Caring connections*. Neighborhoods and communities can be a unique network of support for children and families. Parents encourage their child's healthy development when they help their children connect to their neighborhood's youth activities, youth leaders, seniors, and mentors.

Of course, these are not all of the factors that influence your elementary-school-age children's development. However, these are areas where you have a significant amount of influence and control.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents **Summary**

The Middle Years: Peer Relationships

Friends can help your child learn how to cooperate, solve problems, and develop long-term relationships with others. Most children spend lots of time with their friends. It is not surprising that children who have healthy friendships also have higher self-esteem and do better in school than children who do not have healthy friendships. It is also not surprising that children who are consistently rejected by others are more likely to drop out of school and have relationship problems later in life than those who are well liked.

Bullying can become a problem during the middle years. A bully is a child who has a strong need to feel powerful and in control. A bully tries to gain power by teasing, threatening, hitting, and stealing from other children, and by ignoring adults and rules. While many children may act like bullies occasionally, a child who frequently bullies other children is likely to have more social and behavioral difficulties as she or he grows.

Boys and girls show bullying behavior in different ways. Boys tend to act out their bullying in physical ways such as hitting. Girls tend to show their bullying in relationships by excluding other children from activities or gossiping about other girls. The effects of either behavior can be equally damaging. However, research has shown that parents can play an important role in encouraging healthy friendships and helping prevent or change bullying behavior. As parents, you can help your child build positive relationships in a variety of ways, including:

- *Providing lots of opportunities to play with other children.* Children learn about healthy friendships through practice. They should have ample time to play with other children each week.
- *Supervising your child's playtimes.* In some neighborhoods, it is safe for children to wander down to a friend's yard or the park, or to ride bikes in the street. Parents can talk with each other and organize who is watching the interactions between the children and who is available if the children need help solving problems.
- *Organizing playtimes.* Sometimes, informal play with other children is difficult to arrange. Parents can help by setting up play dates or a playgroup in their home or at a nearby park or recreation center.
- *Intervening early to prevent bullying.* Parents can help their child learn how to respond effectively to bullies by teaching him or her how to use words to solve problems. If the aggressive behavior persists, parents can seek extra help from teachers, school counselors, or a psychologist.

If parents have ongoing concerns about their child's ability to make friends, they can talk with other parents, school counselors, parent educators, social workers, and other health care professionals.

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Middle Years: Popular Entertainment Media

American children today are immersed in the popular media—music, television, movies and videos, video games, computers, and the Internet. The average American child spends 38 hours each week using a combination of all types of entertainment media. These forms of media are powerful teachers!

The media can have both positive and negative influences on your child's healthy growth and development. They can offer a broad range of ideas, provide information that is useful in school, and promote your child's ability to understand other cultures in our world. On the other hand, the popular media can expose your children to violent images and adult material that are potentially harmful to their healthy development.

Some of the harmful messages are subtle. They may encourage aggressive and/or disrespectful relationships by making such relationships appear funny and attractive. Other messages in the lyrics of songs or scenes in movies or TV shows are openly violent. They have graphic images of angry outbursts, bloodshed, suicide, or torture that, over time, can contribute to less caring and sensitivity to real acts of aggression. Boys and girls hear the same media messages but feel the impact differently. Boys may learn that being violent is the same as being strong or macho. Girls may learn that sex and violence are always linked. As parents, you play an important role in guarding your children from violent media and the messages they can teach. You can help by:

- *Setting limits.* Involve your child in setting a total daily or weekly time limit for use of all entertainment media, including TV, videos, computer and video games, and music.
- *Setting family guidelines for media content.* Explain clearly to your child what TV programs, videos, or music are allowed. Remove or turn off violent, graphic, or adult media that are potentially harmful for children. Involve your children in setting the guidelines.
- *Keeping entertainment media out of your children's bedrooms.* Put TV sets, computers, video game systems, and VCRs in a family area of the house and out of children's bedrooms where use is difficult to monitor.
- *Turning media use into a family activity.* Make time to watch TV or surf the Internet with your children and discuss what you are viewing.

Parents can also add their voices to the larger organizations that work to prevent the harmful impact of media on children. If you are concerned that your child may have been unusually affected by violent media programming or has difficulty breaking away from TV, you may wish to talk with your child's school counselor or a psychologist.

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***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Middle Years:
After-School Care and Monitoring

An estimated 5 million children are home alone before or after school. Some children successfully care for themselves after school for an hour or two. But statistics show that children who begin caring for themselves after school (called self-care) at a young age are much more likely to get involved in risky behavior than children not in self-care. The after-school hours from 3–7pm are when violent juvenile crime peaks. This is also the time when youth are most likely to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and sex.

Some parents may be unsure how much after-school freedom is OK for older children and youth. High-quality after-school programs provide peace of mind for some parents and children and have important benefits, including friendships, better grades, and better behavior during school hours. Despite the fun and benefits, some children resist programs that look too much like child care or activities that look too "supervised."

Programs can be as simple as unstructured "drop-in" times provided by a neighbor or a community center. Other after-school programs may be school-based and have a structured curriculum. Some neighborhoods offer an integrated learning program that includes resources from the school or that combines community resources from local businesses with those from faith-based organizations. Integrated programs often include tutoring, mentoring, life-skills training, and service projects.

Recent research shows that the healthy development of children ages 6–12 requires a lot of adult supervision and parental monitoring. As parents, you play an important role in providing for your child's enriching after-school activities by:

- *Monitoring your child's after-school hours.* Monitoring means that parents know where their children are, who their friends are, what they are doing, when they are going out, and when they are coming back.
- *Supporting efforts to increase after-school programs in your community.* Parents can work with local schools, community recreation departments, businesses, and faith-based communities to develop new programs or enhance existing ones.
- *Adequately prepare your children for self-care.* If parents have no other option but to leave their child alone after school, the child will need the parents' help to plan ways to handle the responsibility, including what to do in case of emergencies.

You can contact your local child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R), local public library, school district office, recreation center, or cooperative extension office to find more information about after-school programs in your area.

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The Middle Years: Encouraging School Success

Perhaps it is not surprising that the link between doing poorly in school and engaging in other risky behaviors is well documented. It is also not surprising that children who do well in school and are connected to school through school activities such as music, sports, or clubs are less likely to become involved in risky activities such as substance abuse, crime, or violence. As parents, you have critical influence over your child's school success in several important areas. Those areas include:

- *Connectedness.* Encourage your child's attachment to parents, guardians, grandparents, teachers, or mentors who will support lasting relationships and friendships.
- *Competency.* Help your child develop academic and social skills, including the ability to solve problems and make age-appropriate, independent decisions.
- *Aspirations.* Support your child's ability to set goals for a successful future and develop strategies for achieving those goals.
- *Effective schools.* Help your child to find a supportive, safe learning environment that challenges all students to do well and that supports them in their efforts to do so.

Parents play an important role on their child's teaching team. Making time to attend parent-teacher conferences and school activities is one part of that role. Being available to help if the teachers have a concern about your child's progress also shows that you care. It helps to make time to talk to the teacher if you have questions or are worried about how your child is doing.

While some teachers may hesitate to intervene unless a child is lagging two or more grade levels behind other students in the class, the evidence suggests that early intervention is critical. The further behind a student falls in his or her school work, the more likely it is that he or she will fail and develop a sense of hopelessness. Seek out the teacher and discuss what you can do before your child's academic problems become overwhelming.

One way that parents can help teachers identify problems early is by sharing their concerns and being open about relevant parts of their child's history. Parents can also take the lead and request an assessment if they are concerned that their child might have a learning disability. When parents, teachers, and school staff work together, most difficulties can be resolved and strategies can be developed that will help the child have a successful school experience.

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A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Middle Years: Conflict Management

Making friends, getting along with others, and peacefully resolving conflicts are essential social skills for your children to learn and practice during their elementary and middle school years. These skills are especially important during these years, as children gradually become more concerned about being accepted by other children their age.

Research suggests that there is a relationship between aggression and being rejected by others. The difficulty is that it is hard to know what comes first. Does the aggressive behavior prevent the development of good friendships, or does rejection by other children make a child feel hostile and aggressive? Regardless of what comes first, if your child does not learn how to make and keep good friends, the cycle of rejection and hostility is likely to continue. This cycle can contribute to violent behavior or to becoming a victim of violence.

As parents, you and your family play a critical role in fostering skills that encourage appropriate ways to handle conflict without becoming aggressive. Your child learns by watching you, his brothers and sisters, and other relatives. You can help by:

- *Listening to your child.* Take time to encourage your child to use words and to explain what he or she needs, or what the most important issue is, while you actively listen.
- *Using negotiation and compromise.* Once you understand your child's concern, work with your child to negotiate a solution that is acceptable to you and to your child.
- *Giving reasons for rules.* Sometimes a rule is not negotiable, but you can clearly state the reason for the rule as often as necessary, so that your child understands and is more likely to respect the boundaries that you have decided on.
- *Refraining from physical discipline.* Hitting, slapping, and spanking may lead to further aggressive behavior. Parents may want to consider choosing less physical options, such as redirection, negotiation, or an age-appropriate amount of time-out.

Research in schools shows that students and teachers who are trained in conflict management and mediation are more likely to work together for joint goals and have a safe school environment. Individual children benefit, too. Positive outcomes for students who learn how to resolve conflicts without aggression include higher self-esteem, better mental health, and *resilience*, or the ability to overcome and thrive in difficult circumstances.

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A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Middle Years: Caring Connections

Resilience is defined as the ability to face, overcome, and be strengthened by adversity.

It has been well documented that one *protective factor* for resilient children is a multigenerational network of friends, teachers, and relatives. If a resilient child is in trouble, he or she has a broad network of friends to turn to for help and support.

The SEARCH Institute is a nonprofit organization that supports the healthy development of youth and families. SEARCH researchers have spent a number of years identifying protective factors and critical assets that help children avoid risky behavior such as smoking, alcohol abuse, and poor school performance.

SEARCH has also identified deficits in children's lives that may promote risky behavior. When a child has many more assets than deficits, he or she is less likely to get into serious trouble and more likely to be resilient during difficult experiences. The SEARCH Institute's work also consistently shows how important it is for youth to connect with other friends and adults in their community and to develop lasting relationships. As parents, you can encourage your child's connection to the community and support lasting relationships with friends his own age and with adults in a variety of ways. For example, you can help by:

- *Supporting your child's extracurricular school activities.* Taking part in music programs, sports, the arts, and clubs (such as scouting and 4-H) can help children meet others with the same interests and build friendships.

- *Supporting your child's participation in community activities.* Local recreation districts, the faith community, and nonprofit organizations offer activities for children. These activities can help your child meet others with the same interests and adults who can serve as positive role models.

You may want to volunteer your own time to support activities for youth. When parents organize or support youth activities, they set a positive example for their child. They become connected to their child's friends and to other families. Your community can be a unique network of support with shared relationships and resources. During the inevitable difficult times, both you and your children will have more friends and resources available to sustain you.

For more information about the work of the SEARCH Institute, visit their Web site at http://www.search-institute.org.

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A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents Summary

The Teen Years: Developmental Overview

Change is rapid in the years of development between childhood and adulthood, called *adolescence*, when every part of a child's body is affected by a surge of growth. During early adolescence (ages 10 or 11 through age 14), children worry about how they look, have mood swings due to hormonal changes, and are highly focused on friendships. By middle adolescence (ages 15 and 16), teens are more comfortable with themselves but may push family boundaries with new behaviors. By late adolescence (ages 17–19), many teens have reached their adult size and focus on independence and peer relationships. Differences in individual teens' growth patterns can make them anxious. Their emotions may be difficult for parents to handle.

Despite their sometimes rebellious actions, most teens still value their families and abide by their parents' rules more often than they will admit. Teens with consistent support from their parents and families will likely navigate these difficult years successfully. But there are several areas where parents' actions can make a big difference in their teenagers' lives. Those areas include:

- *Organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement*. Participating in community activities and helping solve community problems builds civic-minded and caring youth and adults. Parents can set an example by finding opportunities where the family can volunteer together.

- *Substance abuse*. The link between the abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs and delinquent or violent behavior is much clearer now than it was a generation ago. If parents suspect that their teen is involved with alcohol or drugs, they should act promptly to get help from a health care provider who specializes in substance abuse prevention and treatment.

- *Access to guns and other weapons*. The increased access that youth have to weapons and the role that weapons play in serious crime, suicide, and homicide is cause for national concern. Many parents consider removing any guns from their home. If guns are permitted in the home, they must be handled responsibly and locked in a secure location.

- *Peer influence*. Peer pressure can encourage youth to do well or push teens into risky behaviors. Parents and strong families provide an important buffer for their teens that can help guide their choice of friends. Family support increases the likelihood that teenagers will make responsible choices even if there is strong pressure to get involved in risky behaviors.

- *Dating relationships and violence*. Dating is a normal part of healthy development, but some dating relationships can become abusive or violent and have a devastating long-term impact. Parents can help by encouraging group activities and talking about healthy relationships.

- *Transitions to adulthood*. Preparing for the future and the transition to young adulthood increases during the teen years and does not stop when the teen reaches the age of 18. Parents can help with the continuum into adulthood by encouraging their teen's education, work experience, and life skills, as well as remaining as a safety net if difficulty occurs.

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***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Teen Years: Organized Activities, Volunteerism, and Community Involvement

Doing volunteer work and good deeds for neighbors, helping solve community problems, and taking part in political action can help teens move beyond themselves into the larger world. Recent research shows that taking part in sports, arts, music, organizations, and hobbies encourages a variety of positive outcomes for youth. Some of the benefits include decreased delinquency, greater school achievement, increased self-control, and increased sensitivity to the needs of others.

You as parents should help your teen guard against over-scheduling his day, but you can set an example of a balanced life that includes community service. For example, you might:

- *Stay involved in school and community organizations.* Teens who see their parents attending school activities and volunteering in community organizations are more likely to feel that school work and community service are important.

- *Talk with your teen about community issues.* Teens often have valuable insights into how community problems might be solved, especially if those problems involve other teenagers. When you encourage your teen to share her ideas, she will feel that her opinions matter and that there can be successful solutions to community problems.

- *Attend community cultural events as a family.* When your family attends community cultural events, your action reflects a respect for and appreciation of the neighborhood's uniqueness. This, in turn, fosters a sense of healthy pride in your teen.

- *Encourage your teen's participation in music, the arts, or sports.* Neighborhood bands or music groups, community theatre or dance, and neighborhood sports leagues help teens channel their energies in productive ways, build community spirit, and have informal adult mentors.

For more information about how you can encourage your child's participation in community organizations, you may wish to talk with representatives of local youth clubs, the YMCA/YWCAs, your local recreation district, Boy/Girl Scouts, religious organizations, and the Urban League.

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The Teen Years: Substance Abuse

There is a strong relationship between teen alcohol use and aggressive or delinquent behavior. Teens who use alcohol are more likely to try or to become users of illicit drugs than other teens. Alcohol abuse and substance abuse are implicated in the leading causes of death among teens and young adults. The risk of death increases if the teenager has access to guns or other weapons. Alcohol use and drug use are also strong predictors of aggressive or violent behavior in dating relationships.

Given the alarming information about the relationship between alcohol or substance abuse and future problems, one would think that youth would get a clear message about its use and its dangers. However, many parents may minimize alcohol or substance abuse issues in their children because they drink alcohol or use drugs themselves, or did so during their teen years. New information suggests several problems with this way of thinking about teen drug use. *First*, today's drugs are more potent and addictive than drugs of 20 years ago. *Second*, the adolescent and young adult brain is more vulnerable to addiction than researchers previously thought. *Third*, researchers have found strong evidence of links between substance abuse and memory loss, mental illness, psychiatric conditions, or learning disabilities.

Many teens credit their parents as a major influence in choosing not to smoke or use alcohol or drugs. Here are some simple ways to minimize the risk of substance abuse in your teens:

- *Help with homework.*
- *Eat dinner together three or more times a week.*
- *Be clear and consistent about your family's values and rules.*
- *Set an example by being honest.*
- *Engage in healthy family activities.*

Strong parenting can play an important role in discouraging teens' risky behavior, but parents alone cannot prevent teens from trying or becoming addicted to alcohol or illicit drugs. Addiction can occur in any household, happy or unhappy, and at any socioeconomic level. If you suspect that your child is abusing alcohol or drugs, it is important that you seek immediate help from a counselor specializing in substance abuse issues. Current medical practice and research supports the view that addiction is a disease and that, as with other chronic diseases such as diabetes, it requires prompt and appropriate medical attention.

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The Teen Years: Access to Guns and Other Weapons

Many adults in the United States grew up in households with guns. They were taught about gun safety by their parents or relatives. But things have changed. Easy access to guns, combined with a popular culture that glorifies violence and the use of weapons, is cause for national concern. Even families who have traditionally had guns in their homes feel a need to take more safety precautions than ever before.

In the lives of many teenagers, violence involving a gun or another weapon is a daily threat. One recent survey of inner-city students showed that as many as 40% carried a weapon outside of school. Firearm homicide is now the second leading cause of death of all youth between the ages of 15 and 19. Murder involving guns is the number one cause of death for African American youth. Guns also play a major role in suicides, which increased 39% between 1980 and 1994.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), more youth began carrying guns as drug trafficking grew, and specifically when crack cocaine was introduced into communities. Even youth who were not involved in drugs began to feel the need to carry a weapon for protection. Parents should stay alert to signs that their teenager does not feel safe—a situation that can lead to carrying a gun. Boys, in particular, may not know how to tell their parents about their fears. They may feel that showing fear decreases their "macho" image or increases their vulnerability.

Early signs that your teen is fearful include:

- *frequent headaches or minor illnesses;*
- *frequent requests to stay home from school or refusing to go to school;*
- *changing routes to or from school;*
- *resisting participation in school functions, clubs, or activities; and*
- *discovering a weapon concealed in the teen's room, backpack, or possessions.*

One way to start a discussion with your teenager about this sensitive topic is by sharing a newspaper article about school violence and asking if he or she has any friends who have had similar experiences. You can also work closely with school staff and community leaders to encourage safe neighborhood and safe school strategies. Working with others in the school and community will help in a variety of ways, but primarily by letting your teen see that safety matters to you.

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The Teen Years: Peer Influences

Friends can encourage one another to do well in school, stay away from drugs and alcohol, and refrain from sex. Just as easily, friends can challenge one another to take dangerous risks and reject school or your family's values. Some research confirms what traditional wisdom tells us: keeping "bad company" encourages risky and delinquent behavior.

Research also suggests that children who have an ongoing pattern of aggressive behavior or rejection are more likely, as teenagers, to be friends with other aggressive youth. Gangs are a modern-day example of a group of antisocial friends. Only a small number of teens join gangs, but gang members are the perpetrators in three-fourths of the murder and assault acts committed by youth. Gang violence today is deadlier than gang violence of previous years largely because the weapons of choice are automatic weapons rather than chains or switchblades. Not surprisingly, one of the early signs that a teen is in trouble is affiliation with gangs or groups of antisocial friends.

While parents cannot pick their child's friends, they can have a powerful, often indirect, influence on how their teens select friends in two primary ways:

- *Parental monitoring.* When parents know where their teens are, who they are with, and what their teenager is doing, he or she is less likely to get involved in deviant behavior. The most successful parental monitoring takes place when parents show a genuine interest in their child's activities and are warm and caring rather than intrusive.

- *Parental guidance about where the teen will spend time.* Parents can set boundaries about the appropriate places where teens can spend their out-of-school time. For example, teens can spend out-of-school time involved with school clubs, sports teams, recreation centers, volunteer work, religious organizations, a job, or home activities. Spending time in these ways minimizes the amount of time a teen has available for unproductive or potentially dangerous activities.

If you are concerned about your teen's friendships or about gang activity in your neighborhood, you can talk with school counselors, mental health professionals, religious leaders, or the police.

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***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Teen Years: Dating Relationships

In our society, most teens begin exploring relationships with the opposite sex while still in high school. This early "going-together" behavior, such as sitting together in the lunchroom or talking on the phone, is usually harmless. However, teens can be pressured by their friends, the media, or their family to behave in mature ways before they are ready. Then, these innocent friendships can become destructive.

Dating violence is a pattern of actual or threatened abusive acts between two people who are dating. Conservative estimates suggest that physical aggression happens in at least one in five dating relationships. Often the pattern of abusive behavior begins early in a young person's life. A child who has witnessed family violence, has been exposed to severe physical punishment, or has aggressive friends may be more likely to be involved in an abusive dating relationship. Other factors include alcohol or drug use.

An often-overlooked aspect of relationship violence is in same-sex relationships. New findings suggest that violence in gay and lesbian relationships occurs just as often as in heterosexual relationships. These victims are less likely to be taken seriously or get protection when they seek help.

As a parent, you play an important role in helping your teen understand intimate relationships, and you can help in several ways:

- *Model respectful behavior.* Parents' major contribution is to set an example of respectful behavior in their own partner relationship.
- *Delay "couples" dating until at least 16 years of age.* Many teens are actually relieved if parents convey the value that it is better to have good friendships and participate in group activities than to give in to pressure to have one partner.
- *Limit or discuss TV shows or movies that show abusive relationships.* Parents can watch shows with their teenager and discuss the story with their child, countering images that do not support their family's values.
- *Encourage education programs that discourage dating violence.* Parents can encourage schools to educate students about relationship violence within the larger context of violence prevention. Appropriate support and intervention should be provided for both boys and girls.

If you are concerned about your teen's dating relationship, you can talk with school counselors or community professionals, such as those at a rape crisis center, who specialize in working with people in abusive relationships.

The information contained in this summary is taken from the Teen Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents *by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).*

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Educational Resources Information Center

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Illinois Violence Prevention Authority

***A Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents* Summary**

The Teen Years: Successful Transitions from Adolescence to Young Adulthood

For most teens in our society, the transition from secondary school to work or college begins during their sophomore or junior year in high school. The years from 15–19 are important as teens anticipate what they will be doing after high school, prepare, and make the transition. Although many teens hope to attend college, others will choose job training or go directly to work. However, the constantly changing work environment and the increasing demands for more education can make choices confusing. The last two years of high school can be a stressful time for parents and teens.

There is growing awareness of the critical importance of teens' successful transition from secondary school and the risk of violence if the transition is not successful. Data suggest that young people between the ages of 17 and 25 are vulnerable to violence and criminal activity. However, the evidence also suggests that young people who can establish a healthy structure for their lives, including a stable work and family life, tend to stay out of trouble or end their previous involvement in delinquent activity.

Here are some ways that you play a crucial role in helping your teen with this important transition to adulthood:

- *Providing your teen with access to career and employment counseling.* You can encourage your teen to meet with school counselors or community college counselors to explore career options, education or training requirements, job availability, and salary expectations.
- *Encouraging your teen to take part in internships or other career-related exploratory experience.* Teens who have a part-time job or internship often report having an enhanced self-image and better understanding of the skills required for the workplace.
- *Helping your teen investigate college options early.* Your teen can narrow her college search and then visit with college advisors or faculty in your teen's area of interest. This will help her focus on achievable goals during her last two years of school and ease her transition to college.
- *Understanding that your teen's transition to adulthood is a process.* Turning 18 doesn't immediately make a young person capable of handling all aspects of adult life. Understanding that the process is gradual and that young adults still need considerable guidance and support from others will likely make the transition less frustrating for everyone.

If you are concerned about your child's transition from high school, you can talk with other parents, school counselors, college advisors, and professionals employed in your teen's area of interest.

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